

TECHNOLOGIES OF SELF



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PREFACE

... *Technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.*

~ Michel Foucault, *Technologies of Self*¹

As an expression of mental states that are often difficult to cast in language, art is a source of perceptual and contemplative stimulation outside the statistical normality of the mundane physical world; it expands our experiential domain and challenges our concepts of what can exist. Art is a gateway and an interpretive lens for contemplation and reflection, in ways that are emotional, conceptual, and ineffably perceptual.

Himalayan and Indian artistic traditions acknowledge, and orient themselves towards, this function. These artistic traditions have a rarified aesthetic, which is at once alluring and lyrical, enigmatic and symbolic, hierarchical and referential. Densely packed with meaning, it allows the unfolding of entire perspectives. It embodies a deep and engaging opportunity to reflect on human experience.

Insight is a conceptual structure that is derived from reflection and contemplation, it emerges from the internal testing and experimentation like rays of clairvoyance, and transcend the labels and associations of the initial stimulus. Insight is the greatest gift of art.

This exhibition has been curated around an extremely rare portrait of the 16th scholar and treasure revealer named Sherab Özer (Sanskrit: *Prajñarasmī*). His organization of the vast branches of Buddhist traditions under one general unifying principle with eight distinct paths (the *Chariots of Spiritual Accomplishment*) was an unique achievement in the millennium of philosophical discourse starting from the first diffusion of Buddhism to Tibet in the 8th century. It also served as the substrate and inspiration of the “vastly influential” 19th century Impartiality (*rime*) movement. In homage to Sherab Özer’s contributions, and consistent with the way in which essence is taught (*gdams ngag*), the exhibition includes a selection of portraits of teachers in both two- and three- dimensional formats to represent the Chariots.

As is evident by its appropriation of the title *Technologies of Self*, this exhibition has been inspired by its first from Michel Foucault, and further contextually from Matthew Kapstein’s article on Sherab Özer². The introduction will analyze definitions of the *self* in the context of modern science, and based on that analysis attempt to provide a path towards creating *Technologies of Self* in the sense defined by Foucault. Based on the discussion, the works in the catalog have been divided into three parts, Phase I contains to works that rely on narrative, Phase II contains works relating to the hierarchical conceptualization of deities, and Phase III contains works related to the Tibetan Technologies of Self as framed by Kapstein.

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1 Foucault, Michel, Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton. 1988. *Technologies of the self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

2 Kapstein, Matthew. *gdams ngag: Tibetan Technologies of the Self*. 1995. In *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.

INTRODUCTION

Technological trends in automation, artificial intelligence, and genetic engineering have lent a sense of urgency to questions regarding self-identity, raising concern with what appears to be an adversarial juxtaposition of *technology* and *self*. Yet, with the renaissance of scientific activity regarding the workings of the brain, it is precisely their synergy that is most exciting. It raises the possibility of technology acting, not in support of productivity, but of the qualia of human experience. The precondition for *Technologies of Self*, is a set of precise definitions of the *self*.

In the spirit of Foucault's eponymous lecture, we begin by asking how can one have knowledge of the *self*? Modern scientific theory appears to be converging on sophisticated forms of Bayesian inference as the means of knowledge held by the physical apparatus of the brain¹. This statistical form means that knowledge is structured by *prior* representation of the environment, which in part occurs by semantic classification of objects. Such a semantic classification has been shown to be well defined (i.e. semantic meaning is directly mapped onto specific areas of the cortex)², and is likely a consequence of emergent structural hierarchies from physical processes. Applying the mathematical formulation of Bayesian inference to the brain generally involves approximating the prior probability distribution with a factorized family of functions³. I posit that the semantic representation of the world corresponds to one of the brain's method of factorizing the prior probability distributions (thus, we can call it *semantic factorization*).

The development of the Bayesian brain hypothesis has a long history dating back to the physicists Hermann Helmholtz (1821–1894) and Edwin T. Jaynes⁴ (1922–1998). However, for expository and illustrative purposes, we herein use Karl Friston's formulation of it in 2008 called the Free Energy Principle⁵. In it, the brain has a representation for the state of its sensorium, makes predictions for its future using an (internal) generative model, and compares its predictions to the actual measurements it receives from the sensorium. The brain's imperative is to minimize⁶ the error in its predictions (minimize model-error, often called surprise or variational free energy), which it does either by either updating its generative model (learning) or attempting to make the environment conform to its prediction (action). In other words, the epistemic function of any sub-system of the brain is a neural network implemented feedback-control mechanism⁷ that continuously reconciles observable data with endogenous models. The large corpus of work with the model includes an explanation of the relationship between perception and action (exteroception), the connection between somatosensory data, emotions, and physiological response (interoception)⁸, and motivated control of action⁹. However, most work has been focused on short time scales (< 1 second, reflexive behavior and to some extent percepts) and limited to considering a single sensory modality at a time. For example, of the decision tree in most environments is well-modeled in game-theoretic terms¹⁰; and since the formulation

1 This definition is sufficient because of matched *prior* assumptions regarding the ontological status of reality. Describing the brain as a physical apparatus presupposes a phenomenal world of matter and energy, embedded in spacetime, with precise mathematical laws describing changes of state. Within this framework, the inputs to the brain from the sensorium must also originate from some real substance. Knowledge in this framework is referential (i.e. assumes the prior existence of the object), deferential (encodes a reference to the source and type of sensory data to corroborate predictions with). Note that both terms, *reference* and *deference* play an important role in the theory of semantics. As the use of their terms here differs from their canonical use, they have been defined explicitly.

2 The meaning of a word is actually physically encoded in several distinct regions of the cortex. For more information, see: Hutha, Alexander G. et. al. *Natural speech reveals the semantic maps that tile human cerebral cortex*. Nature. 2016 April 28; 532(7600): 453–458. The stability of the semantic mapping across individuals suggests that the optimization over the functional families (i.e. ways in which we can classify objects) is convergent to some well-defined local or global minimum. Further research is still required to understand how hierarchical abstraction maps to the brain. It would be interesting to read this particular (and necessarily extant) mathematical approximation of the family of distributions in context of Kant's Transcendental Idealism. The referent nature of knowledge means that each generative model has a conjugate entity associated with it.

3 For good reviews of the mathematical foundations, see (a) Buckley, CL, Kim, CS, McGregor, S, and Anil K. Seth. *The free energy principle for action and perception: A mathematical review*. Journal of Mathematical Psychology 81 (2017) 55–79 and (b) Gershman, *What does the free energy principle tell us about the brain?* {2019arXiv190107945G} arXiv e-prints arXiv:1901.07945.

4 See (a) Jaynes, E. T. *Information Theory and Statistical Mechanics*. The Physical Review. Vo. 106, No. 4, 620-630. May 15, 1957. (b) Jaynes, E. T. *How Does the Brain Do Plausible Reasoning?* Maximum-Entropy and Bayesian Methods in Science and Engineering.

5 See: Friston, Karl J. and Klapp E. Stephan. *Free-Energy and the brain*. Synthese, 159:417-458. 2008. The nomenclature is one of the several misleading elements in the theories' standard diction. The Free Energy Principle is not strictly a principle of statistical physics, but of Information Theory in the tradition of Shannon (Shannon, C. E. *A Mathematical Theory of Communication*. The Bell System Technical Journal, Volume 27, pp. 379-423, 623-656, July, October, 1948.)

6 There are several limitations to this process. (a) The brain can only minimize over the basis set used to functionally represent the sensorium. (b) There is likely some tolerance ("sufficient reason") beyond which further optimization is not performed. (c) It is well known that attention modulates this process – or in other words, i.e. tolerance is governed by internally specified salience. See Dołęga, Krzysztof. *Commentary: M-Autonomy*. *Frontiers in Psychology*. Volume 9, 2018. (d) Not all processes of the brain need to follow this formalism.

7 *An interesting area of research is to understand how neural dynamics can act as control systems. This includes elucidation on the role of feedback, recurrence, probabilistic simulation, and information compression*. This is relevant independent of the actual implementations in the brain, and might have important implications for model-free learning. As an example on neural implementation of a Kalman filter, see Wilson, Robert C. and Lief H. Finkel, *A Neural Implementation of the Kalman Filter*. Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems 22, Curran Associates, Inc., 2009. 2062--2070

8 Seth, Anil K. *Interoceptive inference, emotion, and the embodied self*. Trends in Cognitive Sciences, November 2013, Vol. 17, No. 11

9 Giovanni Pezzulo, Francesco Rigoli, and Karl J. Friston. *Hierarchical Active Inference: A Theory of Motivated Control*. Trends in Cognitive Sciences, April 2018, Vol. 22, No. 4.

10 Peter D. Grunwald and Philip Dawid. *Game Theory, Maximum Entropy, Minimum Discrepancy, and Robust Bayesian Decision Theory*. The Annals of Statistics. 2004, Vol. 32, No.

of strategies involves higher order mental faculties such as language, imagination, and thought, it follows that generative models must involve reference to conceptual and narrative structures on longer timescales. Coupling between thoughts and action means that the generative models are likely to factorize along an internal hierarchical classification of *self*¹¹ (i.e. a self-model) with non-trivial causal relationships¹² between layers within the hierarchy, and also between the *self* and external semantic factors¹³. Action of the embodied form is predicated on the existence of self-models, which can also be thought of as an “objectification”¹⁴ of the *self* which the model (implicitly) refers and defers to¹⁵).

Herein, by discussing previous research on memory and the default mode network in context of the *self* (which is present across memories, and hence a form of mutual information), I propose one of the mechanisms by which self-models develop to encode semantic properties. This developmental account helps to elucidate challenges related to the generation of self-models (despite their effectiveness at reducing the variational Free Energy)¹⁶. Meditation is then discussed as a scientific means of analyzing the *prior* assumptions of self-models regarding covariance between the *self* and external factors (consistent with Kapstein’s implicit framing of Meditation as a *Technology of Self*). As another *Technology of Self*, I conclude by suggesting spurious covariance in self-models may be reduced by shifting the cognitive burden away from memory-driven postdiction towards active and principled reflection prior to action and with active, structured traversals of semantic spaces.

The capacity for the body’s actions to influence one’s surroundings suggests to the brain a causal correlation between thoughts and actions. Similarly, the environment has the capacity to act on the embodiment as well. Generative models will therefore encode correlations between the body and the environment, as a way of ensuring that the body can successfully negotiate with its environment to achieve its various objectives. Framing questions about the future essentially relates to self-models, because we must predict our own behavior to understand what we might do, and then see our own limitations, and how we might overcome them. Making future predictions implicates the role of memory in construction of generative models. There are also correlations between different aspects of the self-model itself, for example, between thought, emotion, and physiological response, between thoughts and motor control, and so on^{17,18}.

Let’s examine what correlations between hierarchical scales means, and how such correlations are created. Learning a semantic self-model (i.e. a self-model in which the *self* is given some attributes [such as diligent, wise, unreliable, kind, etc. and behavioral patterns]) is important because it provides a short-hand that can easily be used in real time while our generative models simulating various game-theoretic situations to facilitate the planning of action. To understand how a semantic self-model is created, one needs to consider how semantic memories are consolidated. It is well known that the system of storing episodic memory involves both the hippocampus and neocortex, with the hippocampus guiding a slow, system consolidation in the neocortex. While prior knowledge can facilitate neocortical learning, the two-step transition of new infor-

4, 1367–1433.

11 The *self* can have several concurrent definitions in the brain, with different *self*-models being used based on the context. For a discussion of various definitions of *self* (non-metaphysical), see: Mateusz Wozniak. “I” and “Me”: *The Self in the Context of Consciousness*. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 04 September 2018 doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01656. For example, different subsystems of the brain are involved with internal and external focus (see: Oosterwijk, Suzanne et. al. *Concepts in context: Processing mental state concepts with internal or external focus involves different neural systems*. *Soc Neurosci*. 2015 June; 10(3): 294–307. doi:10.1080/17470919.2014.998840.)

12 This essay will discuss the question of causal correlation and covariance between semantic factors, and discuss one’s “integration” in context of said correlations. This integration should not be confused as being related to “maximally integrated” in Information Integrated Theories (IIT) of consciousness. IIT is a theory most readily understood in context of the connectivity between sub-systems of the brain, whereas the correlation of specific semantic factors refers to the specific connections formed in the brain to infer causal relationships within a specific context.

13 Arguably, the way in which we factorize and model the *self* stands related to every aspect of life, and extends far beyond differentiation between *me* and *not-me* for minimization. Previous work using the Free Energy Principle in context of *self* has mostly focused on the existence for an ownership model of experience (i.e. ability to differentiate *me* and *not-me*).

14 This is the language commonly used in Eastern philosophical traditions, (i.e. the [metaphysical] *self* cannot be objectified). However, the self-models that we develop are objects and can be studied as such in neuroscientific inquiry. For example, see Jie Sui and Xiaosi Gu. *Self as Object: Emerging Trends in Self Research*. Volume 40, Issue 11, 643-653, November, 2017.

15 One of these, is the *self-as-subject*. There are many different accounts for what this means, and entire epistemological systems around if – and how – the *self* as subject can be known. In light of the referential nature of semantics (which is within the realm of discussion in this work), a simple definition of the *self* as subject (for illustrative purposes only) is the *self* as the essential condition of possibility for self-awareness. This work will not discuss the nuances of various metaphysical definitions of *self*.

16 Wherein stability is considered in comparison to the noise of external events, fluctuations in body state, stochastic fluctuations in synaptic activity.

17 One of the criticisms of machine learning algorithms is that they are unable to interpret their hidden layers. But when an expert explains how they arrived at a conclusion, they are not actually analyzing their generative model, but breaking a larger problem down into many small problems, running the generative model on the small problems, and constructing a larger inference problem around the correlations between outputs from the smaller problems. Therefore, I argue that the black-box nature of machine learning isn’t the problem (bottom-up mechanistic analysis), but rather the capacity for composability (top-down inference based on contextual references).

18 Recent research shows that algorithms measuring cues and micro-fluctuations in the body can detect actions a couple of seconds before they are about to be performed. One hypothesis is that model induces physiological responses, that are then used to reinforce inhibition of a planned action if needed. Anticipation and dread may be part of this physiological coupling of predictions, and may be one of the bases for the effectiveness of the variable reward mechanism in altering behavioral patterns (i.e. changing models). I have also been wondering about the role of micro-fluctuations in speech: that we construct linguistic statements is an essential part of our experience as an epistemic agent. Yet it has also been showed that micro-fluctuations in muscular activity in the jaw can reconstruct speech. To what extent is the appearance of a “speaker” in the mind actually interoceptive projection?

mation is designed to avoid “catastrophic interference” with prior knowledge that conflicts with the newly acquired¹⁹. The Default Mode Network (DMN) of the brain is not involved in the encoding of episodic memories, but is active during the retrieval of both episodic memories (intrinsically autobiographical)²⁰ and semantic memories²¹. The DMN is also responsible for mind-wandering behavior, which has recently been described as a method to (a) identify mutual information in otherwise distinct temporal events (*efficient episodic hypothesis*) and (b) decouple mutual information from the originating events by transformation into semantic memory (*semantic optimization hypothesis*)^{22,23}. This potential relation of mind-wandering to learning of generative models has implications for synaptic plasticity in the neocortex that would be worthwhile developing mathematical models for²⁴: for example, one might consider define mathematically various kinds of autocorrelation functions between thoughts during mind-wandering and attempt to derive a statistical relation to the formation of new cross-column synaptic connections in the neocortex.

In concert, the Free Energy Principle, the *efficient episodic hypothesis* and the *semantic optimization hypothesis* suggest that mutual information in life-events is encoded in semantic properties as a type of statistical inference that minimizes the error of generative models. In the theory of semiotics, the assignment of semantic value to the pair of *signifier* and *signified*²⁵ is the process of “meaning-making” (or signification), and as of such, the humanistic notion of meaning can be placed within the context of the Free Energy Principle. As the *self* is present in all episodic memories, the generation of semantic knowledge is fundamentally mediated by one’s own generative self-models. The *self* is mutual information across all episodic memories. This also means that self-models are refined based on the recognition of patterns in observable data (thoughts, somatosensory data, perception) across long timescales. It is for this reason that narratives are the principle form of signification in human life.

Narratives are higher order conceptual structures that provide a causal framework for a set of internal and external events²⁶, creating links between otherwise disjoint sequences of events and ideas, and their associated semantic graphs, by hard-coding mutual information. They are constructed in a rather piecemeal and iterative fashion. Narratives also encode information on multiple temporal scales: on short timescales, they provide consistent explanations for actions within the context they were performed (episodic consistency), while on longer timescales encode semantic properties that are relatively stable when evaluated against the recollection of memories (global consistency)²⁷.

The signification process described above means that the semantic attributes emerging from autobiographical narrative are chosen such that they act as a kind of mnemonic device for the recursive reconstruction of decision-making processes across multiple points in time. Averaged over the whole narrative, the self-models encode an average correlation between various internal observables (thought, emotion, physiological) and external events. Inflection points in a narrative (i.e. moments of change and transformation) are points at which the self-model necessarily must deviate significantly between two temporal events, lest the model-error encoded in semantic properties be too large. This explains why signification on the level of a narrative involves identifying the sequence of inflection points (salient points of personal change) and the set of minor events that build up to said sequence. This sequence helps teach what factors are most likely affect homeostatis either through instability or transformation.

Yet it is important to recognize that self-models constructed from narratives exhibit some major deficiencies. Autobi-

19 Squire, L. et. al. *Memory Consolidation*. Cold Spring Harb Perspect Biol 2015;7:a021766

20 See: (a) Huijbers W, Pennartz CMA, Cabeza R, Daselaar SM (2011) The Hippocampus Is Coupled with the Default Network during Memory Retrieval but Not during Memory Encoding. *PLoS ONE* 6(4): e17463.

(b) Huo, Lijuan et al. “The Default Mode Network Supports Episodic Memory in Cognitively Unimpaired Elderly Individuals: Different Contributions to Immediate Recall and Delayed Recall” *Frontiers in aging neuroscience* vol. 10 6. 24 Jan. 2018, doi:10.3389/fnagi.2018.00006

21 Yang Xiao-Fei, et. al. *Intrinsic Default Mode Network Connectivity Predicts Spontaneous Verbal Descriptions of Autobiographical Memories during Social Processing*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, Volume 3, 2013, p. 592

22 Caitlin Mills, Arianne Herrera-Bennett, Myrthe Faber, and Kalina Christoff. *Why the Mind Wanders: How Spontaneous Thought’s Default Variability May Support Episodic Efficiency and Semantic Optimization*. *The Oxford Handbook of Spontaneous Thought: Mind-Wandering, Creativity, and Dreaming*. Ed. Kalina Christoff and Kieran C.R. Fox. May 2018.

23 Recently, techniques involving spaced repetition have been adopted to enhance learning of new semantic knowledge (most notably, for language). The process of conversion of episodic memory to semantic memory provides an explanation for the brain pathways through which spaced repetition might function.

24 Note furthermore, that consecutive pulses in the cortex tend to create new synaptic links corresponding to semantic memory.

25 One could argue that our representations (as discussed herein) are the *signifiers* and that the actual referents as required by Bayesian inference are the *signified*

26 The similarity matrix of semantic properties essentially forms a graph structure, which means that the objects and concepts stored in semantic memory exist in relation to each other. When objects reference each other – mutual reference, then predictions are stable only if the definitions are mutually consistent (i.e. traversal of a graph cycle). Narratives, I would contend, or at least good ones, are in part auto-generative, insofar as we can spontaneously generate the details and causal relations, picking up from any point in time. This reinforces the notion of some form of graph cyclic consistency.

27 The power-law distribution of mutual information in narratives may thus be a result of the role of recall in the consolidation semantic memory. For information about the role of depth in power law dynamics, see: Henry W. Lin and Max Tegmark *Critical Behavior in Physics and Probabilistic Formal Languages*. *Entropy* 2017, 19, 299

ographical narratives are constructed based on only the small fraction of data an individual observes, making it difficult to encapsulate the real causes underlying historical events. Further, the narrative as a linguistic object lives in a highly complex phase space, with many local minima. In other words, narratives are degenerate: many possible narratives that can explain the same events. One might further imagine that, due to coupling between internal and external systems, self-models are susceptible to becoming a receptacle for errors in generative models for external systems. This is confounded by the fact self-models for the brain's functioning cannot be based on direct measurements of the subsystems which are being modeled (as there is no direct perception of internal brain states).

Semantic attributes are also not without their risks. As the *self* cannot be extracted from any situation, semantic attributes of its self-model can be extrapolated to situations quite dissimilar to the context of the episodic memory from which they derived. Any properties that are assigned to the self-model can affect one's actions, physiologically, and thoughts; and as a result, measurement of posterior distributions can reinforce through self-similarity the interpretation of the semantic attribute. Through interoception, semantic attributes of the self-model can be viscerally felt, and hence can affect quality of life. Despite the risks involved with the process, drawing inferences from past events and synthesizing data to make future predictions is at the core of the brain's epistemic function. That self-models originating from autobiographical narrative have utility in reducing model error only implies that they are good mean-field predictors for long-timescale trends in behavior. Yet the actual semantic values that they assign to the *self* are not reliable indicators for the true causal relations of the brain.

The challenge of developing good narratives extends to issues concerning learnability in general. The way in which traversal of the phase space of semantic relations is performed critically affects learnability²⁸, and it makes sense that there would exist some method of actively regulating parameters involved in the process of learning. Based on an analysis of the subsystems involved in the DMN, it has been hypothesized to play a critical role in reinforcement learning²⁹. Along these lines, the mind-wandering activity of the DMN can be generalized as a form of traversing a phase space of potential thoughts and ideas. States such as depressive rumination, dreaming mind-wandering, creative cognition, goal-directed thought, and even second order cognitive agency have been parametrized by degrees of coupling of embodied cognition with cognitive niche³⁰, and as domains of a phase space defined by deliberate and automatic constraints³¹. This phase space is thus partially characterized by the degree of second-order cognitive agency.

In one limit of attentional control and deliberate mental action, the brain creates “specific form of conscious self-representation, namely, a global model of the cognitive system as an entity that actively constructs, sustains, and controls knowledge relations to the world and itself”³², which Metzinger calls the *epistemic agent*. Insofar as individuals perceive themselves as this agent, the *epistemic agent* corresponds to a self-model that exists separate, but correlated with, the embodied self. Its existence gives a concrete example of hierarchical depth in a semantic self-models. In context of the Free Energy Model, it has been suggested that the emergence of the *epistemic agent* is a means of regulating attention towards error in generative models³³. Indeed, it seems likely that the second-order cognitive agency encapsulated in the *epistemic agent* can enhance learnability (help to minimize the variational free energy) across all forms and domains of generative models. For example, this could be achieved by changing *a priori* assumptions during statistical inference, changing initialization data, by tuning the degree of integration between models for different datasets, or through analogy with models used for different objects. The existence of second-order mental agency is an essential precondition for *Technologies of Self*, for without it, there can be no deliberate and consequential tools for affecting change on oneself.

In science, one of the methods by which hypotheses are validated is by meticulously constructing environments in which causal relationships can be precisely inferred. In light of a precise causal model, many spurious correlations can be falsified. Applied to the study of self-models, this means one should control one's environment in order to discern more accurately the causal origin, nature, and probabilistic distribution of thoughts, develop a signification for the transient nature of internal stimuli (emotions, thoughts, memories), and reassess correlations between internal and external factors. In this context, meditation can be viewed as the application of the scientific method towards the study of the *self*. It involves observing inner

28 Optimization problems like this are typically NP-hard, often with non-smooth landscapes and many local minima. In context of learning self-models (which are modeled as Hidden Markov Models), see Verwer, Sicco and Eyraud, Rémi and de la Higuera, Colin. *PAutomaC: a probabilistic automata and hidden Markov models learning competition*. Journal of Machine Learning, 2014 96 1, doi 10.1007/s10994-013-5409-9

29 Dohmatob E, Dumas G, Bzdok D. *Dark Control: Towards a Unified Account of Default Mode Function by Markov Decision Processes*. doi:10.1101/148890. PPR:PPR19436.

30 Fabry Regina E. *Spontaneous Cognition and Epistemic Agency in the Cognitive Niche*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, Volume 9, 2018, p931, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00931

31 Christoff, Kalina & C. Irving, Zachary & Fox, Kieran & Spreng, R. Nathan & Andrews-Hanna, Jessica. (2016). *Mind-wandering as spontaneous thought: a dynamic framework*. Nature Reviews Neuroscience. 17. 10.1038/nrn.2016.113.

32 Metzinger, Thomas. *M-autonomy*. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 22, no. 11-12 (2015): 270-302.

33 Dołęga Krzysztof. *Commentary: M-Autonomy*. *Frontiers in Psychology*. Volume 9, 2018, p680, doi 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00680

experience under the hypothesis (*prior* representation) that experience can be decomposed into sparsely connected hierarchical sub-domains with fully consistent dynamics and stability under semantic signification. Meditation typically elucidates the natural variance of the mind's activity, and helps to minimize spurious correlations between hierarchical scales in semantic self-models.

In most philosophical and contemplative traditions, the practice of meditation culminates in the discovery of some irreducible self-model³⁴. Across traditions of Eastern philosophy, the various irreducible self-models share the characteristic that *gnothi sauton* (“know yourself”) and *epimelesthai sautou* “to take care of yourself” coincide³⁵, specifically through the idea that knowledge dispels suffering. To understand why, various semantic properties of irreducible self-models are considered (albeit briefly). For a self-model to exhibit stable properties, it must correspond to a physically extant neuronal sub-system, over which a Markov blanket can be drawn. Note that the phenomenal experience corresponding to irreducible self-models are not truly empty, insofar as the physical factors supporting their dynamic existence are necessarily objects of intentionality within the space. Yet insofar as the objects of intentionality are ineffable, they appear to transcend semantic characterization, and thus appear empty of phenomenological form (though not necessarily of noumenal)³⁶. Self-models with minimal or non-existent connectivity with the motor cortex lead to the conclusion that the *self* is not a physical actor; though as the *self* is the precondition for experience, any semantic self-model indirectly structures future action (i.e. the perception of causal distance between the *self* and action). When the sub-system to which the self-model corresponds to is involved in the internal regulation of some physiological property (serves to maintain homeostasis), its atemporal appearance is perceived as a source of comfort (bliss). That irreducible spaces are discovered through falsification of semantic correlations lends it the self-model being understood as the non-falsifiable core of existence. That an epistemic functionality results in a comfort that stands at causal distance from external affairs is one basis for the notion that knowledge dispels suffering.

An alternative approach to developing *Technologies of Self* is one that is externally oriented, i.e. attempting to correctly understand the statistical and causal relationships in the external world. This intrinsically means understanding the world conceptually, instead of solely through narrative construction. As we saw earlier, learnability is deeply related to the way in which the DMN stochastically traverses the phase space of semantic relationships. Therefore, one can imagine some *Technology of Self* which actively facilitates structured traversal in order to enhance learnability. For example, when one observes one's own thoughts during meditation, the frequency distribution of the intentional objects exhibits self-selection bias, and therefore skews and limits the process of signification. This bias is not particularly relevant when attempting to develop a minimal self-model, but may be significant when the goal is unbiased knowledge of external systems. As an alternative, one might imagine that linguistic propositions can act as anchors that structure one's traversal of phase space, and develop programs that systematically evoke associations across large areas of the semantic atlas in a meditative context.

Similarly, one way of reducing complexity may be through identification of conceptual hierarchies that are characterized by unidirectional causal relationships. Unidirectional here means that one seeks a conceptual framework whose the linguistic formulation remains invariant to the context in which it is applied, yet can be adapted to the context in order to provide useful behavioral predictions. Relying on conceptual understanding shifts cognitive load from signification using postdiction during episodic recollection to prediction-based strategies (possibly leading to better global outcomes). I am exploring the potential for such methodologies with a mobile application that I have developed (named *Sum, Ergo*³⁷). Its goal is to facilitate a structured traversal of semantic phase space as it relates to the *self* and self-models by combining meditation with reflection on conceptual categories (such as Happiness, Duty, Harmony, Desire, Truth, and Self).

34 Irreducible self-models can be empirically tested by defining Markov blankets over neuronal sub-systems. This has been done for the ARAS with some very interesting analysis. See: Metzinger, Thomas. 2018. *Minimal Phenomenal Experience*. MindRxiv. April 13. doi:10.31231/osf.io/5wyg7.

35 Foucault, Michel, Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton. 1988. *Technologies of the self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

36 This statement applies even when the Markov blanket is drawn around a system of interconnects between subsystems. In such a situation, the internal states are predominantly characterized by their functionality, and not the contents that pass through the network.

37 <https://www.sumergoapp.com>



FORM I
NARRATIVE SEMIOSIS

MIRACLES AT ŚRĀVASTĪ

18th Century, Central Tibet

91.5 h × 66.1 w cm (image), 173.4 h × 96.3 w cm (with silks)

Distemper on cloth

01

ཏྲ་ལྷའི་ཚེས་གཅིག་གསལ་རྒྱལ་མཚོད་པའི་ཚེ།
 ཚེམས་ཤིང་ས་ལ་བཙུགས་པའི་ལྗོན་ཤིང་རྒྱས།
 དཔག་ཚད་ལྷ་བརྒྱུར་བྱས་པའི་ལོ་འདབ་ཀྱིས།
 ཇི་རོས་སྐྱེ་བོས་ཚིམ་མཛད་དེ་ལ་འདུད།

On the first day of the first month when King Prasanajit made offerings to Buddha,

A marvelous tree grew by placing a toothpick on the ground

And its branches extended for five hundred miles,

I prostrate upon you who satisfied all beings by the fragrance and taste of the tree.

Trans. Karma Gelek



02

ཚེས་གཉིས་ལྷ་ཏྲ་ཡ་ན་མཚོད་པའི་ཚེ།
 གཡས་གཡོན་གཉིས་སུ་རིན་ཚེན་རི་གཉིས་སྐྱལ།
 དེ་ལས་སྐྱེས་པའི་འབྲས་དང་མེ་ཉོག་གིས།
 འགྲོ་ལྷན་ཚིམ་པར་མཛད་ལ་གུས་པས་འདུད།

On the second day when King Utrayana made offerings to Buddha,

On either side of the throne emerged a jeweled mountain,

Each of the mountains abounded with flowers and fruit trees,

I bow to you who satisfied all beings.

Trans. Karma Gelek



^ (1b) Mountain with food for animals
 ^ (1a) Toothpick becomes Tree



^ Mountain with food for people (1c)
 ^ Mouthwash becomes Lake (1d) >

03

ཚེས་གསུམ་ལྷན་ཅི་རྒྱལ་པོས་མཚོད་པའི་ཚེ།
 ཞབས་བསིལ་ _____
 རྒྱ་ཚོགས་རིན་ཚེན་སྤྲིང་པོ་ལས་བྱུང་བའི།
 མདུ་བྱུང་བས་བྱུང་བར་མཛད་ལ་གུས།

On the third day when King Shun Tse of War made offerings to Buddha,

*A lake arose from the water used to wash his mouth,

*Its expanse of 300 kilometers, full with jewels, fish, and fragrances of all kinds,

I bow to you who performs miraculous deeds

* = for reader's convenience only, not a translation



Yet, underlying the ambiguity and plurality of voices, one may find a common conception of the rhetorical form and the function of the miracle. The displays of superhuman knowledge and power are considered to be miracles, because they generate faith in those who witness of them.¹

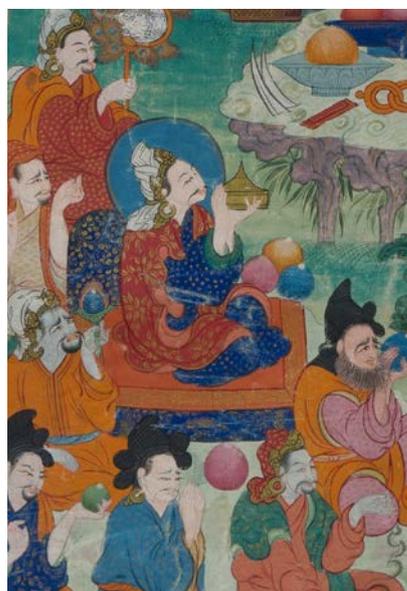
Since antiquity, humans have intuitively harbored a belief in the existence of a deep connection between wisdom (*jñāna*) and superhuman feats (*siddhi*). In relation to the life of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni, the *Miracles at Śrāvastī* demonstrates how a perceived relationship between wisdom (*jñāna*) and superhuman feats (*siddhi*) can be used towards the generation of religious belief (*śraddhā*)². As the story goes, the Buddha was challenged to prove the veracity of his teachings in a contest of superhuman powers by leaders of six other śramaṇic traditions (Table 1). The Buddha agreed

1 Fiordalis, David V. *Miracles and Superhuman Powers in South Asian Buddhist Literature*. PhD Thesis. University of Michigan, 2008. See page 97

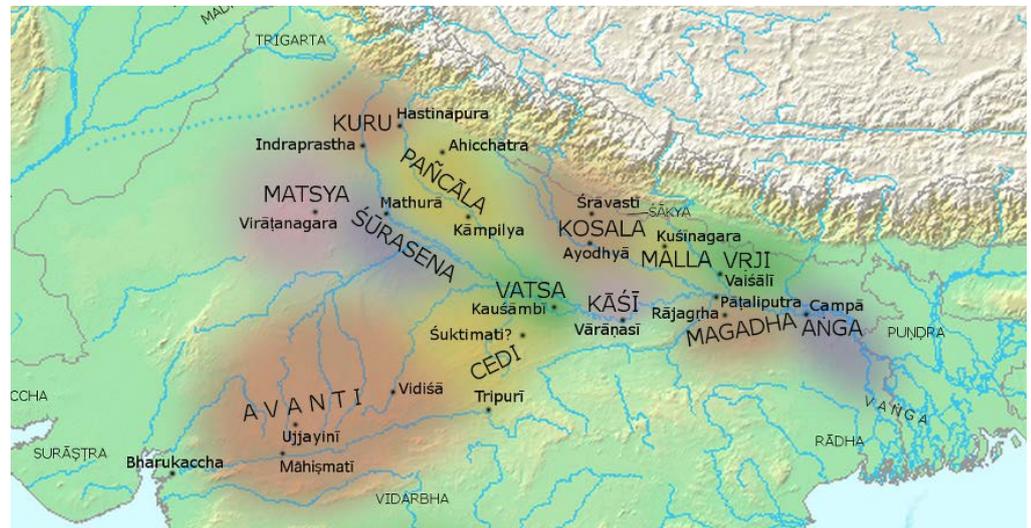
2 This relationship can be stated symbolically as (*jñāna* ↔ *siddhi*) ⇒ *śraddhā*. This is a different kind of statement than normal tri-fold equivalences like *jñāna* ↔ *darśana* ↔ *caritra* or *sat* ↔ *chit* ↔ *ananda*.

Figure 2

(Top) King Prasenjit of Kosala
 (Middle) King Udayana of Vatsa
 (Bottom) King Shun Tsin of War



Map of Indian Kingdoms circa 500 B.C.E⁹



to this context at the behest of the King of Magadha, Bimbisāra, seven years after his enlightenment at Bodhagaya and first Sermon at the Deer Park of Isipatana in Sarnath. Instead of Rājagṛha (the capital of Magadha) where the challenge was made, it was Śrāvastī, the capital of the Kingdom of Kosala, that was chosen as the site for this contest. Though in the story, the discussion around the selection of the contest's site serves to create anticipation, the choice of Śrāvastī was possibly a tactical one. As one of the largest cities in India at the time (a population neighboring 1 million or greater³) and with fewer Buddhist followers than Magadha, Śrāvastī represented a major opportunity for spreading the new religion.

Though there was no standard mode of depiction of the Miracles of Śrāvastī, the subject was an important theme for early Buddhist sculpture across all of South East Asia. The most widely depicted miracles are the miracle of the growing a fruit (typically mango) tree and the multiplication of the Buddha⁴.

In the Tibetan context, the Miracles of Śrāvastī are constituted by fifteen *miracles* that occur over the course of fifteen days. Therefore, this painting is therefore the first painting in a set of five paintings depicting three miracles each.

In the first and most famous miracle, the Buddha plants a toothpick and it becomes a large fruit tree studded with jewels. In the second miracle, he creates two mountains, one with food for animals, another with food for humans, and both acting as a source for rivers. In the third miracle, he uses the water he used to rinse his mouth to create a 300 kilometer wide lake, replete with eight different tastes, seven kinds of jewels, various fragrances and sources of light.

Following the textual description, the painting depicts each of the following for each miracle:

1. The Buddha sits on a throne that is specially prepared for him
2. A King presenting offerings to the Buddha (Fig. 2a-c)
3. The Buddha performs a miracle (Fig. 1a-d)
4. Leaders of the rival traditions in despair (Fig. 3a-c)
5. The Buddha gives a sermon (see *mudrās* and disciples depicted in painting)

Only one other painting is known of this set⁵, depicting miracles 10, 11, and 12. Unlike the present painting, however, the other painting does not depict the leaders

³ *Savatthi, aka: Sāvattihī, Sāvattihī* (2018, Apr 09) Retrieved 2018, Dec 26. <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/savatthi>

⁴ Brown, Robert L. *The Śrāvastī Miracles in the Art of India and Dōrāvātī*. Archives of Asian Art 37 (1984): 79-95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20111145>.

⁵ *Lot 269 A thangka with three Miracles of the Buddha*. Christie's sale 2724 on September 18, 2013. <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/a-thangka-with-three-miracles-of-the-5715998-details.aspx>

Table 1:

Leaders of the 6 rival śramaṇic Traditions based on the
Sāmaññaphala Sutta

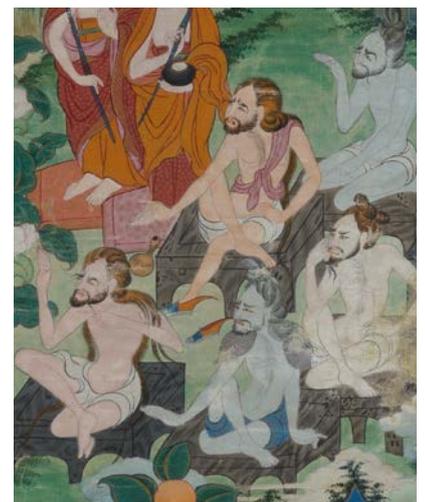
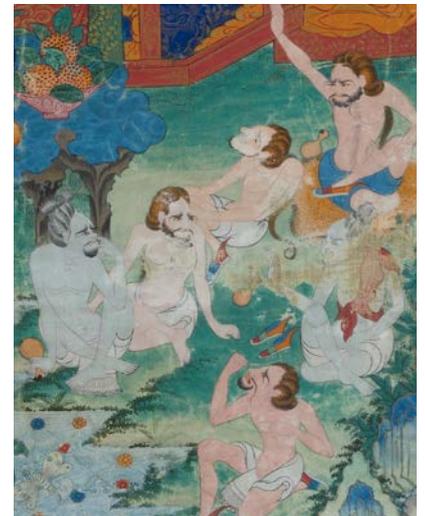
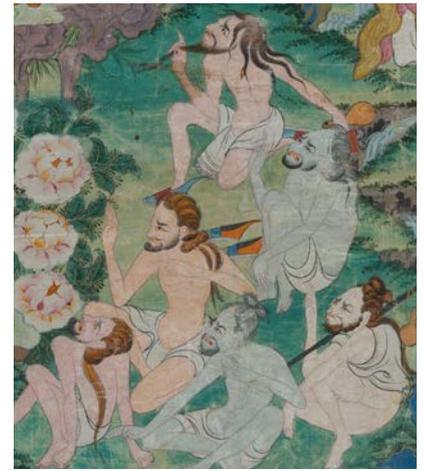
<i>Leader</i>	<i>Tradition</i>
Pūraṇa Kassapa	Veda
Makkhali Gośāla	Ājīvika
Ajita Kesakambalī	Lokāyata
Pakudha Kaccāyana	
Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta	Jaina
Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta	Ajñāna

of the six rival śramaṇic traditions. Thus, this painting is currently the only known painting in Tibetan art that depicts the rivals of the Buddha that played a role in the *Miracles at Śrāvastī* narrative.

Their presence also alludes to a more nuanced semiosis to the *Śrāvastī* narrative. For example, other teachers were capable of performing miracles themselves, and in part for this reason, the Buddha performed not just one, but numerous miracles in the story in order to demonstrate his superiority, in what has been termed the "crescendo effect"⁶. This means that historically, while the first few miracles may represent a historical event, subsequent miracles may have been added for dramatic purposes. Literary records indicate that the Buddha knew the first two kings in this painting. That the crescendo of miracles culminates in increased number of followers constitutes the real differentiation between the Buddha and his rivals. This is evident in the Buddhist classification of three types of miracles: superhuman feats, telepathy, and teaching. In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, the author argues that mundane magic can be performed using a spell, but the ability to teach the dharma (*anusāsani-pāṭihāriya*) requires true knowledge of the nature of reality (*yathā-bhūta-jñāna*)^{7,8}.

In contrast to the Miracles of Śrāvastī, records of miracles in the history of esoteric Buddhism are more appropriately called "magic" rituals. The performance of magic rituals, and their perceived potential in warfare, played an important role in the history of esoteric Buddhism. For example, It is partially on account of the perceived magical powers that Chogyal Phakpa was able to enter into a *yon-chod* relationship with Kubilai Khan. These rituals, however, fit into a larger narrative, wherein Buddhism was seen as a means of enforcing the divine and just rule of a *chakravartin*. However, without the *a priori* notion that the knowledge (*jñāna*) of these monks enabled them to perform miracles (*siddhi*), no belief (*śraddhā*) could be born.

Figure 3: Leaders of Six Rival Traditions in anguish (see Table #1)



6 Fiordalis, David V. *Miracles and Superhuman Powers in South Asian Buddhist Literature*. PhD Thesis. University of Michigan, 2008. See page 97

7 Fiordalis, David V. *Miracles and Superhuman Powers in South Asian Buddhist Literature*. PhD Thesis. University of Michigan, 2008. See page 386

8 The ability to teach what they have learned is what differentiates an enlightened pratekyabuddha from a complete Buddha

9 Avantiputra. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahajanapadas#/media/File:Mahajanapadas_\(c._500_BCE\).png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahajanapadas#/media/File:Mahajanapadas_(c._500_BCE).png). Accessed December 26, 2018. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

ŚĀKYAMUNI BUDDHA

15th Century, Central Tibet

16.4 *h* × 11.8 *w* × 8.3 *d* cm

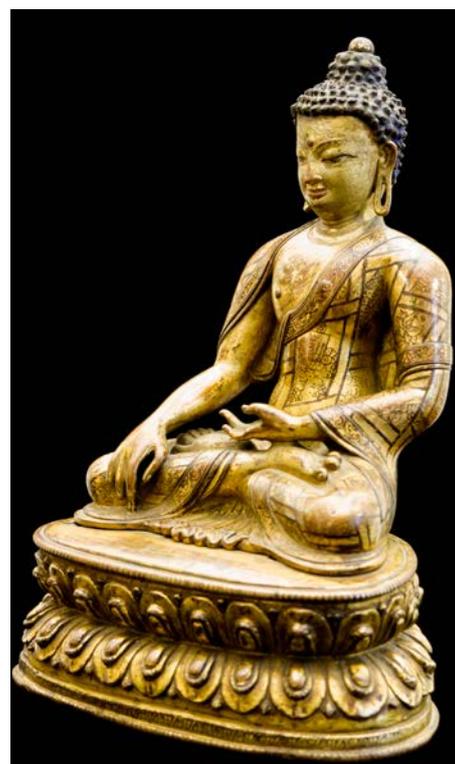
Gilt Bronze with gold, ultramarine, vermilion, white, and black pigment

At the moment of his enlightenment, the Buddha touched the earth (see the *bhūmisparśa mudrā* of the proper right hand) proclaiming the earth as the witness to his awakening to supreme insight and his victory over the illusory forces of the demon Maya. His enlightened status is also depicted by the curls of his hair (*uṣṇīṣa*), while the circular swirl (*urna*) at the center of his forehead is a mark of auspiciousness. His elongated earlobes and the topknot of his hair (which symbolize a crown) both evoke the memory of his former days as a prince, thus emphasizing the Buddha's nobility and subsequent renunciation.

This exquisitely molded bronze of Śākyamuni Buddha is made with the sensibilities of a master craftsman. The craftsman has elegantly rendered even the most minute of curves in the hands and fingers of the Buddha. This attention to detail is accentuated by the arms and feet. Large rectangular patches of the robes are separated by simple thin strips, all joined together by a particularly delicate beading pattern. These large patches are adorned with lotus and peony flowers with foliated accents, and the hems of the robe are patterned with foliated scrolling.

A single patch on the front bears the character *Om* in the *rañjanā* script, and on the back three consecutive patches form the complete *Om Ah Hum*. The facial features are all painted, from the 'cold gold' paint of the skin, vermilion lips, white pigment of the eyes, black irises and ultramarine *uṣṇīṣa*. The deep curls of the *uṣṇīṣa*, the degree of elongation of the earlobes, predominance of the floral motif with the presence of a triangular embellishment at the bottom of the base, tend to suggest a date of the 15th century for the work.

The base of this bronze features a finely inscribed double vajra. Two fish (symbolizing happiness) form the inner circle, with three lotus petals supporting the three prongs of each vajra. A simple circle packing, most commonly found in mandalas of the 14th and 15th century, fills the space between each prong, while undulating ribbons add a sense of movement and dynamism.





ARHATS ANGAJA AND PANTAKA

16th century, Tibet

Distemper on cloth , 64.2 h × 43.5 w

This exceptional and innovative painting illustrates the Arhats Angaja¹ and Pantaka². With white hair and wrinkled skin, the aged Angaja is depicted in a familiar iconographic manner: with a flywhisk over his left shoulder and a long-handled incense burner in his right hand. His attendant – wearing ochre yellow robes – is peeling fruit for his teacher to eat. Near Angaja, a long-life vase resting on a jewel-studded Chinese style table emits multicolored rays of light to signal his spiritual prowess. Meanwhile, Pantaka is found on the bottom half of the painting, compositionally separated by a band of white clouds. Pantaka sits in a relaxed lotus posture with his shoes on, accompanied with his iconographic identifier - a sutra manuscript on a table nearby³. He is accompanied by a retinue of a lion and her cub, a pair of attendants, and a monkey. Another band of green clouds isolates a space at the top of the painting, where a small monastery is seen tucked into a mountain landscape.

From the earliest masterpieces of Guanxiu in the Tang dynasty (9th century), the stunning portraits by Liu Sognian in the Southern Song dynasty (early 13th century), and the imperial majesty of the Yongle style works of the early Ming period, arhat paintings in the Chinese tradition most commonly depict the arhats seated either on rocks or standing. Scroll paintings with arhats on chairs dates back to at least the to baimiao style work of Fanlong⁴ (a student of Li Gonglin), whose work was much admired by the Southern Song Emperor Gaozong⁵. Most of the chairs found in



Fig. 1: Yongle Emperor on his Dragon Throne.

Chinese scroll paintings of luohans, however, are rather narrow, and typically each one is being uniquely rendered in different materials with morphologies and styles to match. In this painting, the arhats are seated neither on rocks nor narrow chairs, but rather on proper thrones that – except for the absence of the dragon finials – are styled after those the Chinese Emperor himself might sit (see Figure 1⁶), with the exception of the dragon finials. Pantaka's throne even copies the hanging jewelry and the shades of apple green jade. the addition of a double lotus base, however, indicates the artist's intention goes beyond mimicry, and is in fact one of appropriation into a Buddhist context.

This painting evidences a familiarity with the compositional framing of arhats with flowing blue-green-gold landscapes in Yongle-style arhat paintings through its own unique appropriation thereof. For example, Yongle-style works achieve a full range of pigment saturation by using the wash technique commonly found in Chinese paintings. In this work, however, the artist chooses to substitute pigment saturation for pigment value, and adds depth to the rocks by contrasting a standard gold outline with subtle shading with black. Azurite has been blended with white to create blues ranging from the darkness of the seafloor to the softness of sky blue. And a fourth color, pink, is added to the thematic palette with the two small pink-purple tinted rocks at the top left. Thin washes of pink are also added to the apple green clouds near the monastery

1 The identity of the first arhat as Angaja is additionally confirmed by a partial inscription reading *[yan lag b]yu[ng]* on the sky blue base of his throne

2 The inscription of *[pha]g[s] pa'i gnas brtan lam bstan ni* near the second arhat (and *gnyis pa lam bstan ni* in the bottom margin) confirms his identity as Pantaka.

3 *Praise to the Sixteen Arhats*. Himalayan Art Resources. Translation of a tibetan text by Jeff Watt. <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=1333>. This iconographic depiction with a sutra book is similar to that found in another Chinese-influenced depiction of Pantaka: [HAR 86922](https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=1333)

4 *Sixteen Luohan*, Freer | Sackler. <https://www.freersackler.si.edu/object/F1960.1/> (accessed 1/13/2019, 12:13:38 PM)

5 *Dreaming the Southern Song Landscape: The Power of Illusion in Chinese Painting*. Valérie Malenfer Ortiz, Brill Academic Publishers, 1999. page 46

6 Wikimedia Commons contributors, "File:Anonymous-Ming Chengzu.jpg," Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Anonymous-Ming_Chengzu.jpg&oldid=104699037. 13 Jan. 2019





SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Francis Newton Souza, 1961
Oil on Canvas, 83.9 h × 61 w cm

Indian subcontinent has been host to a plural and multifaceted ethos that since ancient times has allowed for social, religious, and philosophical traditions to adapt to new stresses and circumstances. It is such a syncretic pluralism that gave rise to esoteric Buddhism in the centuries that followed the collapse of the Gupta Empire, and that also allowed a fledgling 20th century Indian nation-state to define a "Non-Aligned" Third Axis in a seemingly bipolar Cold War Era.

Francis Newton Souza is India's Preeminent Modern Master. In his prime, from the early 1950s to the late 1960s, he obsessively reinvented his artistic style, voraciously subsuming and assimilating both Western and Eastern influences. Each year, he innovated with uniquely identifiable artistic modes and experiments, yet the core of his work and his artistic vision is so clear that each work proudly and immediately asserts F. N. Souza as its creator. Amongst the artists of India, he was one of its most audacious and deep thinkers, he was both an explorer and aesthetic leader.

Having been born into a Christian family in Goa, in 1922, religion was one of the core themes in his painting, a theme about which he was deeply conflicted throughout his life. Though Souza was named after the Patron Saint of Italy, Saint Francis of Assisi, he created rather few works of the eponymous saint. This rare work was created in 1961, during a period of his life when he was living in London, and a year in which he created several compositions with a melody and lyricism in color that revealed a fresh optimism about life. He had published the article *Words and Lines* in 1959, and had begun to receive acclaim for his work in London.

This portrait is one of his finest. Modeled after the earliest known painting of Saint Francis (see Fig. 1), with matching hand gestures, robes, greenish hues, and rectangular frame. Despite its simplistic color palette, it is exemplary in its use of contrasts to create movement. For example, the ochre tints of the skin tone are contrasted

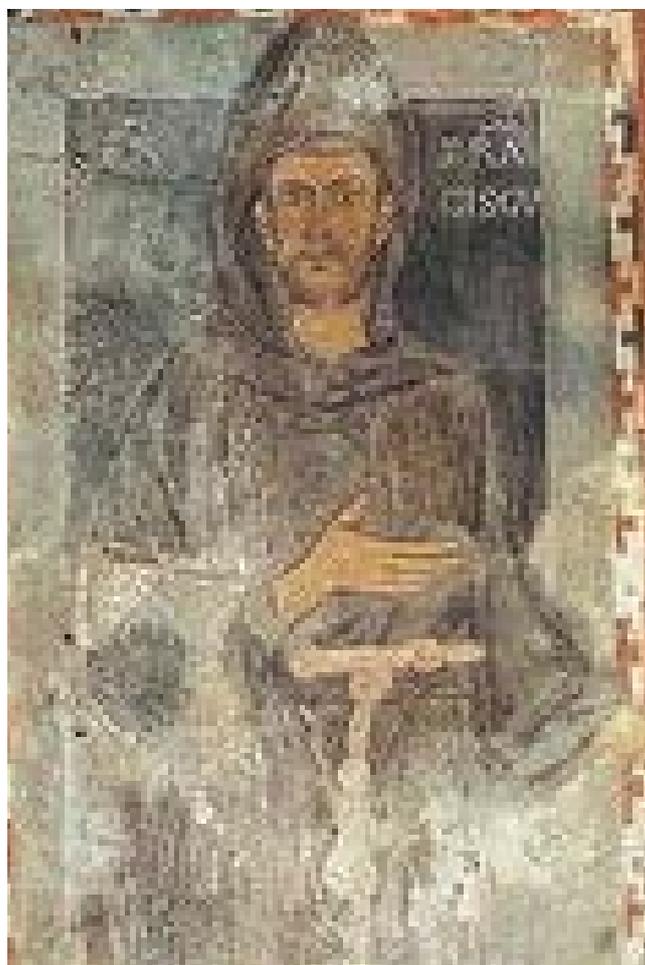
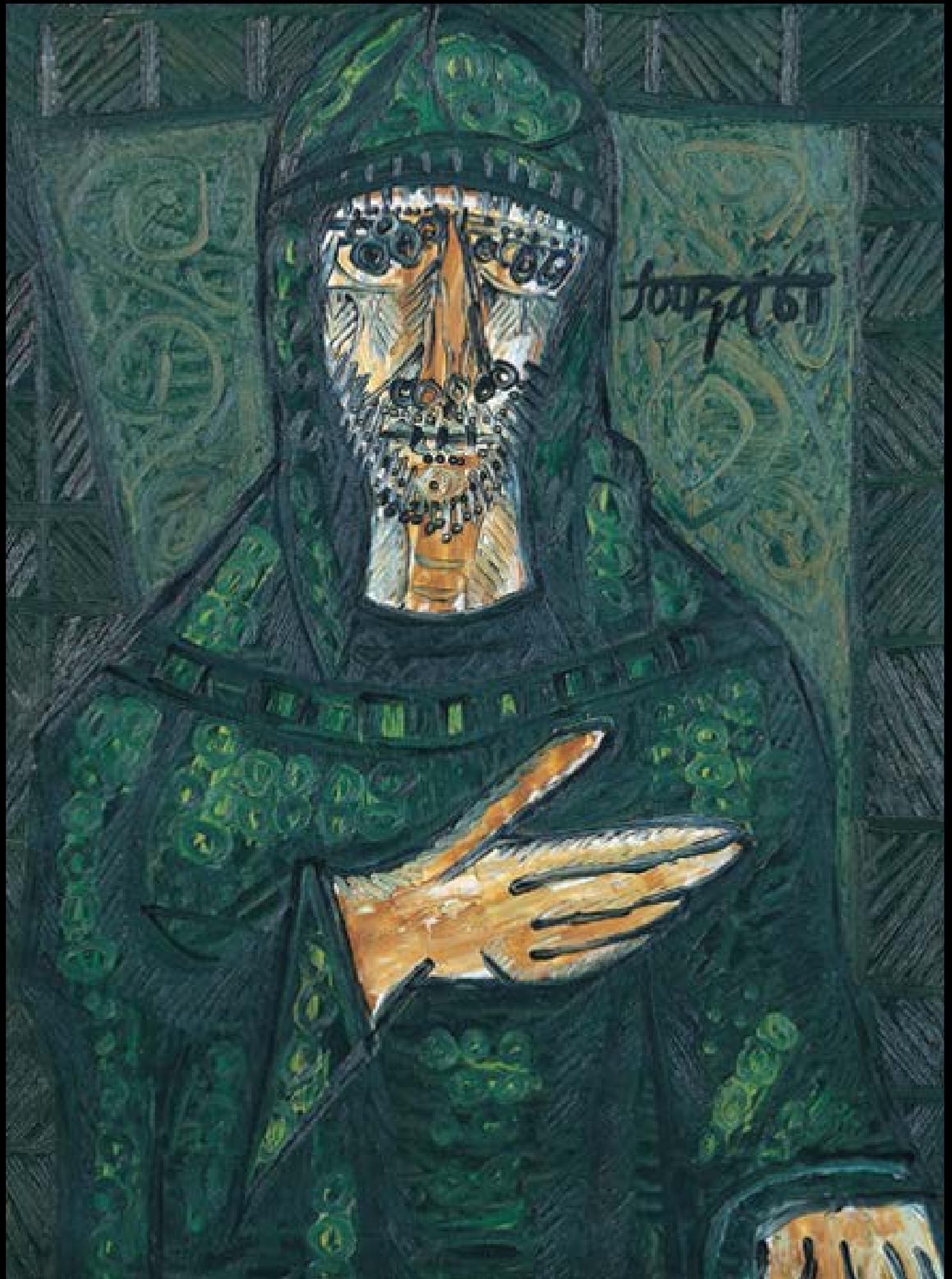


Fig. 1 Saint Francis of Assisi.

with the lemon yellow in the robes to accentuate the presence of the Saint. The alternating diagonal lines in the square tiles of the outer frame not only create an inwards movement of the viewer's gaze, but are masterfully juxtaposed with the tight focus created from the scrolling vine patterns of the immediate background behind Saint Francis. Similarly, a circular pattern on the robes create an austere stillness that contrasts with the richness of the viridian green.

Most fascinating of all is his depiction of the Saint's face: at once emblematic of his style and innovative. Emblematic for the eyes near the forehead, the multiple noses and eyes, a mouth sewn shut, and the cross-hatched definition. And innovative for the unique way in which each hair of his beard is individually articulated with straight lines, highlighted in white, and tipped with small beads. This bead studded facial hair is a rare example within Souza's oeuvre.

Souza has also chosen to sign his name where "Francis" is named in the original.





FORM II
ONTOLOGICAL HIERARCHIES

EIGHT MAHASIDDHAS

18th – 19th century, Palpung Monastery

Distemper on cloth, 66.0 h × 45.7 w cm (image) 120.0 h × 68.6 w cm (silks)

The Tantric communities of India in the latter half of the first Common Era millennium (and perhaps even earlier) were something like "Institutes of Advanced Studies" in relation to the great Buddhist monastic "Universities". They were research centers for highly cultivated, successfully graduated experts in various branches of Inner Science (adhyatmavidya), some of whom were still monastics and could move back and forth from university (vidyalaya) to "site" (patha), and many of whom had resigned vows of poverty, celibacy, and so forth, and were living in the classical Indian samnyāsin or sādhu style. I call them the "psychonauts" of the tradition, in parallel with our "astronauts", the materialist scientist-adventurers whom we admire for their courageous explorations of the "outer space" which we consider the matrix of material reality. Inverse astronauts, the psychonauts voyaged deep into "inner space", encountering and conquering angels and demons in the depths of their subconscious minds.

- Robert Thurman¹

The above quote articulates the reasons why the accomplishments of the Mahasiddhas became the vehicle of legitimacy for teaching lineages of the estoeric Buddhism that proliferated in the second half of the 1st millenium CE. Following the formula in Śrāvastī, the hagiographical accounts of these human figures served as proof of their attainment of *prajñā* and generating faith in the new teachings. Their lives and stories served as illustrations for how reflection on experience leads to the knowledge on the nature of the mind.

This painting belongs to a set of 11 paintings designed by Situ Panchen in the mid-18th century depicting 84 Mahasiddhas, 8 Boddhisattvas, 8 Wrathful Ones². The list of 84 mahasiddhas was compiled by Abhayadattaśri in the 11th-12th century in Campa, and was translated into Tibetan by Mondrup Sherab³. Other lists varied in number, but "most of the lists, in fact, are catalogues – not of siddhas but of their songs of realization or their specific contributions to Buddhist practice."⁴. Abhayadattaśri's list, however, was quite popular in Tibet, and formed the basis for most artistic renderings of the subject. This particular depiction follows that found in the murals commissioned by Jonang Taranatha (1575-1635) for Phuntsokling Monastery in Central Tibet⁵.

This painting set is exceptional not only for the incredible quality of the craftsmanship, not only for its refined and masterful exhibition of the Karma Gardri revival style, but also for the depth in which it conveys the narratives of the mahasiddhas. The landscapes have been shaded in a dazzling range of hues generated by an expert in sifting and formuting pigments during the process of griding the stones azurite and malachite. This painting retain its original brocade, which consists of a blue textile with embroidered roundels of five-clawed dragons swircling around the character 寿 for longevity , interspersed with the eight auspicious symbols.

Including the present work, sixteen works across at least six different sets of this design are known to exist, with

two others belonging to this particular set, one of which is in the Rubin Museum of Art⁶. This set is exceptionally fine, and several features that make this set unique and exceptional compared to the others of the same design. The

D Avalokiteśvara Jinasāgara

- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| 5 Kankaripa | 9 Minapa |
| 6 Saraha | 10 Shantipa |
| 7 Śavaripa | 11 Vinapa |
| 8 Goraksha | 12 Chaurangipa |

	D	
5	6	7
8		9
10	11	12

1 David B. Gray, ed. (2007). *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: The Discourse of Śrī Heruka (Śrīherukābhīdhāna)*. Thomas F. Yarnall. American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University. pp. ix–x.

2 Jackson, David. *Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style*. Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2009. Chapter 6

3 Dowman, Keith, Abhayadatta. *Masters of Mahamudrā: Songs and Histories of the Eighty-Four Buddhist Siddhas*. SUNY Press, 1984. p384 - 385

4 Davidson , Ronald. *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: Social History of the Tantric Movement*. Columbia University Press, New York, 2002. Page 307

5 <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=933> . Jeff Watt further notes that there is a 17th century painting set depicting the full iconographic cycle of 84 Mahasiddhas painted. This set has the same arrangement of Mahasiddhas into rows of 3-2-3, but does not include the 8 Great Boddhisattvas or the 8 Wrathful Ones.

6 Jeff Watt has compiled all of the known paintings of this subject and differentiated them into seven unique sets. <https://www.himalayanart.org/pages/situsiddhaset2/index.html>



Mahasiddhas are depicted with a distinct dearth of facial hair and with faces that appear Sinicized compared to all of the other sets. An emphasis on shading to provide volume and depth to the earthly embodiment of the siddhas, and great attention to detail in the precision of their expertly executed tantric poses and the miniturized scenes that contextualize them.

In this painting, a special form of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara known as Jinasāgara (Ocean of Conquerers) sits on a magenta-colored lotus seat in the sky. Avalokiteśvara Jinasāgara is a yidam of the Karmapa teachers, and was introduced in the 12th century.⁷ Rolling hills rendered in gentle green washes serve as the primary dividing element between rows. Each mahasiddha is provided their own space for their narrative to unfold.

Directly below Avalokiteśvara, is Saraha (The Great Brahmin), seated in full profile as he holds a newly created arrow up towards his face. An admixture of admiration and intrigue evident on his visage. Seated below him is his consort, known as the Arrow Smith Dakini, who is crafting a new arrow from the bunch of black and white bird feathers on the ground near her. It was through her teachings that Saraha mastered the *Mahamudrā* (Great Seal). The arrow is a multivalent symbol. It not only symbolizes the goal of one-pointedness of mind, as a phallic symbol it also represents the path of the tantras. And in Tibetan, its name itself resembles the word for "symbol". Numerous auspicious symbols are on the ground nearby, as people make offerings to Saraha.

At the top left, Kankaripa (The Love-Lorn Widower) sits with an intense expression of sorrow and meditative focus. This gaze is complemented by the blue eyes of the peacock feathers in the fan above. The beauty of these feathers and the lyricality of the orange flowers provide a stark contrast with the half-eaten corpse undergoing a sky burial with vultures and jackals feasting. The scene depicts the precise moment where he is shown the path of the *dharma* and becomes a siddha, as evidenced by a teacher on the rock outcropping nearby holding his hands in *vitarka mudrā*.

At the top right is Śavaripa (The Hunter). Adorned with a garland of flowers, and lips colored red with blood, he wears peacock feathers around his waist and hoists his boar-tipped bow up to the sky. Attendants offer him water from a skullcup and the next arrow with which to shoot the passing deer and elephant nearby. The natural beauty of the river, forest and multicolored rocks is contrasted with the carcasses of the animals he has slaughtered. He takes up the life of a siddha once Avalokiteśvara shows him the negative *karma* resulting from his actions as a hunter.

Goraksha (The Immortal Cowherd) is seated on a rock outcropping in the left-center of the painting. His compassionate expression, with eyebrows curling upwards, manifests as his cows happily graze upon green pastures and rest near a river.

The scene with Minapa (The Fisherman) at the right-center is displayed as audaciously as his story is incredulous: having been swallowed by a fish, the painting shows him in a dancing pose after having cut open the belly of the fish and emerging from his twelve-year period of intense study therein. The large fish is lavishly colored in gold pigment and each scale meticulously articulated.

Shantipa at the bottom-left shown holding a sutra book outside of a monastery in the forest (at which he served as abbot). He is shown envisioning a *ḍākinī*, His role as a teacher is emphasized by the people in supplication, hoping to receive his wisdom. His most well known disciple was Atiśa.

Vinapa, at the bottom center, wears a turban to indicate his royal birth. Not only did he renounced his throne for his love of music, it - as a form of one-pointedness of mind - was also a conduit to mastering the *Mahamudrā*. The painting shows songbirds perched on a tree nearby, as if to say that even songbirds had become enraptured with his music. He is accompanied by a flute player, a drummer, and a vocalist.

The final scene is of Chaurangipa (The Limbless One). The painting finds him at the end of his story, with his once lost limbs restored to his body. A caravan emerging from behind the hills represents merchants who passed Chaurangipa on their travels. In stating that they were carrying coal as merchandise, these merchants had lied to Chaurangipa. As a result, their goods had turned to coal, and these same two merchants are depicted again requesting Chaurangipa to return their goods to normal. The story conveys the existence of a relationship between *siddhi* and *jñāna*.

⁷ Kohn, J. Richard. *Lord of the Dance: The Mani Rimdu Festival in Tibet and Nepal*. SUNY Press, 2001.



COMPLETE MANDALA CYCLE OF THE SARVADURGATIPARIŚODHANA

Last quarter of the 14th century, Kham, Eastern Tibet
Distemper on cloth, 55.9 *h* × 46.4 *w* cm

The evidence supports a position that is curiously both astonishing and reassuring: the Mantrayana is simultaneously the most politically involved of Buddhist forms and the variety of Buddhism most acculturated to the medieval Indian landscape. Briefly, the mature synthesis of esoteric Buddhism – the form defined as a separate method or vehicle employing mantras – is that which embodies the metaphor of the practitioner becoming the overlord (rajadhiraja). In this endeavor, the candidate is coronated and provided with ritual and metaphorical access to all the various systems that an overlord controls: surrounded by professors of mantras, he performs activities to ensure the success of his spiritual “state.” The process represents the sacralization of the sociopolitical environment, as it was seen on the ground in seventh- to eighth-century India.¹ - Davidson

The *Sarvadurgatipariśodana Tantra* (SDPT) is one of the great institutional texts of early Vajrayana Buddhism. The primary function of the text was to remove all evil destinies during this and subsequent ones. Alongside an expository Socratic dialog between Vajrapani and Indra and the presentation of new ritual systems, the text introduces an iconographic cycle of twelve mandalas, the principle of which is a mandala of Sarvavid Vairocana². The Sarvavid Vairocana mandalas of *Sarvadurgatipariśodana* and the *Sarvatathagatatattvasamgraha* were not only the basis for mandalas of subsequent texts, but are uniquely emblematic of the heirarchical political metaphor and self-visualization methodology embedded within the Vajrayana vehicle. Central to the purpose, and clearly reflected in the name of the text, the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* is about negating the consequences of bad deeds and improving the accumulation of merit³. The text was to place the accumulation of merit, which was already an important aspect of Buddhism, within the newly developed esoteric cosmography.

The 204 figures in the overall composition of the present painting relate not only the Sarvavid Vairocana mandala, but the complete group of twelve mandalas described in the text. Five of these mandalas (M2-M6) are placed in a pentagonal arrangement around the primary mandala, symbolizing the vassal states of a *cakravartin* (Universal Monarch), while the deities of the remaining six mandalas (M7-12) – as described in the textual source – are placed in the outer circumference as direct feudal subjects. This compact and elegant symbolic design is found in two other works of this subject from the 14th century, one in the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art and the other in the Rubin Museum of Art^{4,5}. This composition also presages the allegorical arrangement of the Six Universal Monarchs described in the the *Abhidhanottara Tantra* (a commentary on the *Chakrasamvara Tantra*)⁶. We now turn to the transmission lineage in the painting.

The institutional nature of this text is discernable from the teachers who occupy the interstitial spaces between the mandalas on the periphery of the painting. Following the first three figures of 1. Śākyamuni Buddha, 2. Vajrapani, and 3. Indrabhuti, we find three great Indian panditas, the Three Masters of Yoga, 4a. Ānandagarbha (8th-9th century), 4b. Buddhaguhya (8th century), and 4c. Śākyamitra (8th-9th century). All three of these teachers are depicted similarly, with pointed pandita hats patterned with intricate geometric motifs. Buddhaguhya wrote a commentary on the SPDT, which

1 Davidson, Ronald. *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: Social History of the Tantric Movement*. Columbia University Press, New York, 2002.

2 Skorupski, Tadeusz. *Durgati Parisodhana Tantra*. PhD Thesis. The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, 1983.

3 Across philosophical traditions, reincarnation is merely a cosmological framework constructed around the central notion of accumulation of merit [sanskrit word], where merit may be thought of as the quality of action. And in fact, the notion that our fate beyond this life is determined by the quality of our actions in this particular life is not particular to South Asian religions, but present in virtually all globally across religions and cultures, and periods of history. One might say that the creation of conceptual frameworks that link moral conduct in this life to consequences beyond the current life is a result from an innate "belief" in justice. Or rather, it comes from a belief that the "result" is proportional to the "merit" in the action.

4 Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art mandala (*Himalayan Art Resources*, 90536) and Rubin Museum of Art mandala (*Himalayan Art Resources* 906)

5 One 15th example from the Ngor monastery places all remaining mandalas outside of the main mandala, following the depiction found in the murals of the Sarvadurgati Parisodana mandala at Jampa Gumpa, and not the 6 mandala arrangement described in the text. In doing so, it duplicates the deities in mandalas M7-12. This arrangement was likely inspired by the murals of the. Other mandalas of this subject, such as one housed in Museum of Fine Arts Boston (*Himalayan Art Resources* 87231), depict only the central mandala.

6 *Circle of Bliss*. Huntington and Bangdel. X. p313n. The publication discusses the exceptional painting of the Six Universal Monarchs housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The work can be seen also be seen at <https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/59384.html>



precisely in commemoration of their meeting in 1276. Other than being made for that particular ceremony, there are a limited number of reasons that a painting of the SDPT would be created. Contextually, these reasons are consecration of Riwoche's founding in 1276, transmission to a student of Sanggye Önpö, and the passing of Sanggye Önpö in 1296. In all of these instances, the painting most likely would have been made at Riwoche. And yet, the sizeable number of paintings have been attributed to Riwoche¹⁰ are made in the same Sharri style as found at Talkung, and display a remarkable stylistic consistency. Therefore, it is quite unlikely that the work was made at Riwoche. The dating of the work would be confirmed once Konchok Legshé, and his relationship with either Phakpa or Önpö is determined.

The most unusual stylistic feature of this painting is the addition of two snow-capped mountains near the bottom of the painting. The introduction of landscape in this period is uncharacteristically Tibetan, but is seen in at least one (Chinese origin) Yuan dynasty mandala¹¹, and indicative of the introduction of a Chinese landscape element - albeit in an extremely limited way. This stylistic adaptation makes most sense if the painting's patronage was more closely related to Chogyal Phakpa's entourage instead of Sanggye Önpö. The introduction of the mountains also serves the purpose of placing both Chogyal Phakpa and Sanggye Önpö on the ground (as opposed to the sky), which may have been done to indicate that they were both alive at the time of the painting's production.

The ritual ceremony being performed at the bottom of the painting takes place in a hearth, whose size roughly corresponds to textual descriptions¹². The surprisingly small size of the painting is a result of the textual specification of the inner assembly as 12 fingers in width. The seven vessels and incense burner, most likely symbols for the 8 Goddesses of Offering¹³, and the teacher holds a *ghanti* and *dorje*. Overall, this scene lines up with the descriptions for the *homa* rites, which specify the placement of 8 vessels in the hearth, and visualization of Vajrapani.

Appendix: Murals and the Consecratory function of the SDPT

The earliest Tibetan painting from the SDPT is found in the murals of Alchi Dukhang¹⁴, the oldest building in the monastic complex at Alchi¹⁵. The SDPT painting at Alchi is first painting visible in a clockwise circumambulation of the Assembly Hall, and indicates its role in consecration of the building's construction. The radially symmetric arrangement of figures within bands of concentric annuli is a feature of the Alchi murals that appears to have been partially preserved in the present painting (through the arrangement of the 16 Vajras). The Alchi murals, however, only depict the primary mandala from the text, and its assembly is of 33 deities, as it depicts only four of the eight Offering Goddesses.

Murals depicting mandalas from the SDPT also feature prominently at the 15th century murals at Jampa Gompa commissioned by the King Ame Pel of Lo Manthang, for which wall layouts, photographs, and transcription of inscriptions can be found online¹⁶. Cross referencing the mural images and the inscriptions to the text of the SDPT, it is clear that the murals individually render each of the 12 mandalas of the SDPT (Table 1). Similar to Alchi, the mandalas start on the East wall, and extend clockwise to the South wall, likely indicating a consecratory function.

Table 1: Identifying Mandalas of the SDPT at Jampa Gompa

Mandala	Layout #	Inscription
<i>M1</i> Maha-Vairochana Mandala (37)	S-10	n/a
<i>M2</i> Mandala of Śākyamuni Buddha (Body)	S-9	n/a
<i>M3</i> Mandala of Vajrapani (Mind)	S-8	n/a
<i>M4</i> Mandala of Amitayus (Speech)	S-7	n/a
<i>M7</i> 4 Heavenly Kings	S-1	√
<i>M5</i> Mandala of Chakravartin (Qualities)	E-S6	~
<i>M6</i> Mandala of Jvalanala (Activities)	E-S5	~
<i>M8</i> 9 Directional Guardians (Dikapalas)	E-S3	√
<i>M11</i> 8 Planets with 28 Lunar Mansions	E-S2	√
<i>M9</i> 8 Great Snake Kings (Naga)	E-S1	√
<i>M10</i> 8 Great Gods (Mahadevas)	E-N2	√
<i>M12</i> 9 Bhairavas? or other retinue	E-N3	√

10 Jackson, David. *Mirror of the Buddha: Early Portraits from Tibet*. Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2011.

11 Rhie, Marilyn. Brauen, Martin [ed]. *Nine Deity Amitayus Mandala. Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism*. Arnoldsche / Rubin Museum of Art, New York.

12 Skorupski, Tadeusz. *Durgati Parisodhana Tantra*. PhD Thesis. The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, 1983. Page 71 describes a hearth of 4 cubits (72 inches) adorned with a canopy and umbrella, matching the description found herein. Based on an average width of the human head of 6.5 inches, the hearth in the painting is computed as 63 ± 5 inches.

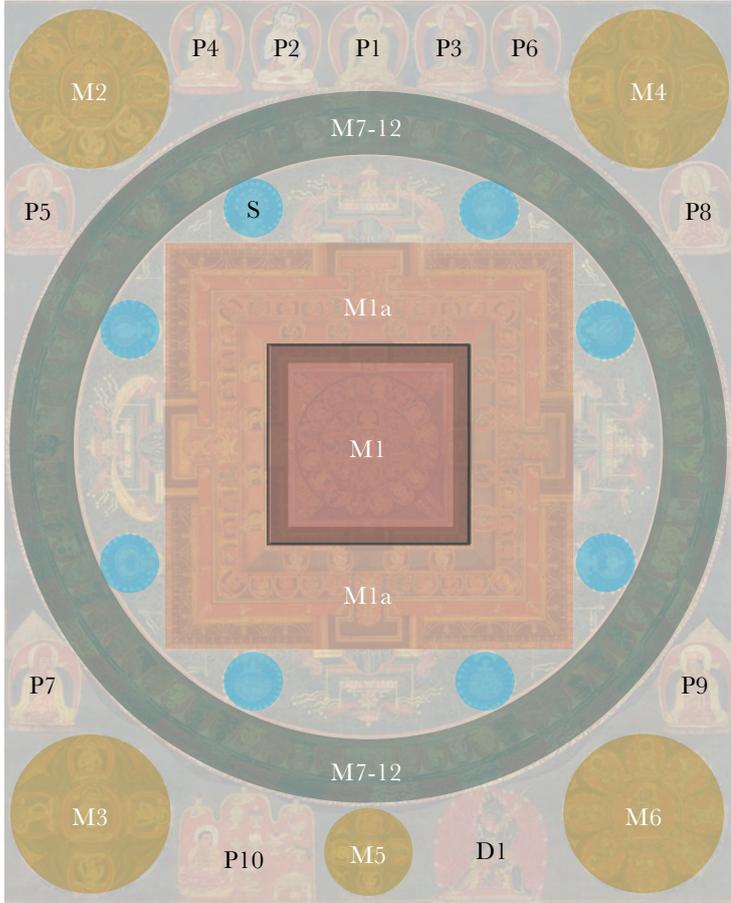
13 Beer, Robert. *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols*. Serindia Publications, Inc., 2003. Page 94. In the painting, we have a (1) Mirror for Laysa, (2) Cloth for Mala, (3) Instrument for Gita, (4) [most problematic] a "dancing" flame for Nrtiya, (5) Incense for Dhupa, (6) Flowers for Pushpa, (7) Candlelight for Dipa and (8) Perfume in a Conch Shell for Gandha.

14 Pal, Pratapaditya. *A Buddhist Paradise. The Murals of Alchi*. Ravi Kumar and Visual Dharma Publications. 1982.

15 Luczanits, Christian and Neuwirth, Holger (2010) 'The Development of the Alchi Temple Complex. An Interdisciplinary Approach.' In: Krist, Gabriela and Bayerová, Tatjana, (eds.) *Heritage Conservation and Research in India. 60 years of Indo-Austrian collaboration*. Wien, Weimar: Böhlau, pp. 79-84.

16 Lieberman, Philip and Marcia R. *Jampa Gompa Photograph Pages and Wall Layouts*. Accessed 2 Dec 2018. <https://library.brown.edu/cds/BuddhistTempleArt/jampa.html>

MANDALAS OF THE SARVADURGATIPARIŚODANA Painting Structure



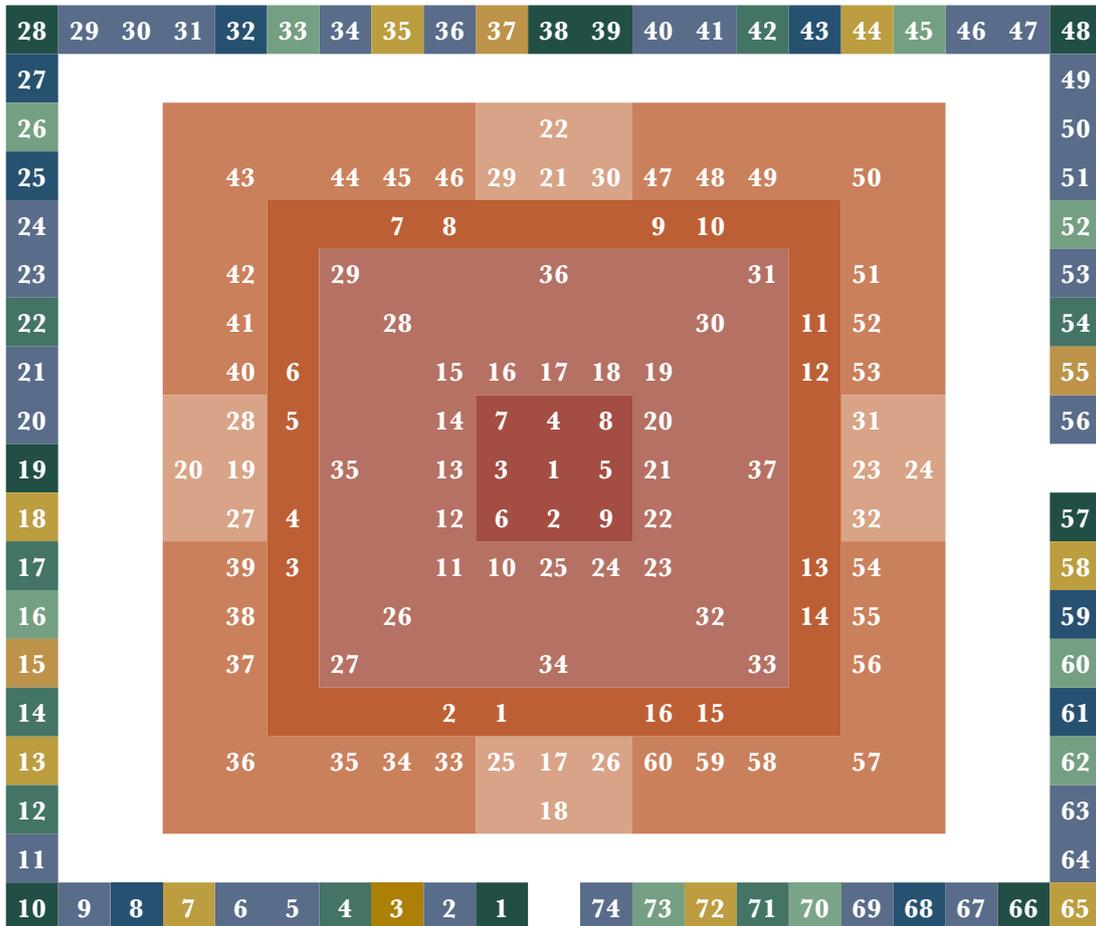
Mandalas of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana

204 Figures + 10 Lineage Teachers + 1 Yidam

<i>P</i>	Abbreviated Transmission Lineage
<i>D1</i>	Chakrasamvara
<i>S</i>	Eight Auspicious Symbol
M1	Maha-Vairochana Mandala (37)
M1a	Bodhisattvas (16), bhiksus and sages (28), wrathfuls (16)
M2	Mandala of Śākyamuni Buddha (Body)
M3	Mandala of Vajrapani (Mind)
M4	Mandala of Amitayus (Speech)
M5	Mandala of Chakravartin (Qualities)
M6	Mandala of Jvalanala (Activities)
M7-12	Deities from other Mandalas (total of 74)

Color Scheme for the Detailed Enumeration Below

M1	Maha-Vairochana Mandala (37)
M1a	Bodhisattvas (16), bhiksus and sages (28), wrathfuls (16)
M7	4 Heavenly Kings
M8	9 Directional Guardians (Dikapalas)
M9	8 Great Snake Kings (Naga)
M10	8 Great Gods (Mahadevas)
M11	8 Planets with 28 Lunar Mansions
M12	9 Bhairavas? or other retinue



SARVAVID VAIROCANA, 37 Deity Assembly (M1)



Inner Assembly (1 - 9)

1, C	Sarvavit Vairocana	6, SE	Locana
2, E	Sarvadurgatiparisodhanaraja	7, SW	Mamaki
3, S	Ratnaketu	8, NW	Pandaravasini
4, W	Śākyamuni	9, NE	Tara
5, N	Vikasitakusuma		

16 Vajras (10 - 25)

Vajra-Sattva	(Self)
Vajra-Raja	(King)
Vajra-Raga	(Love)
Vajra-Sadhu	(Monk)
Vajra-Ratna	(Jewel)
Vajra-Tejas	(Illumination)
Vajra-Ketu	(Discernment)
Vajra-Hasa	(Laughter)
Vajra-Dharma	(Justice)
Vajra-Tiksna	(Cut)
Vajra-Hetu	(Cause)
Vajra-Bhasa	(Speech)
Vajra-Karma	(Deed)
Vajra-Raksa	(Protection)
Vajra-Yaksa	(Spirit)
Vajra-Sandhi	(Union)

Deities

8 Goddesses of Offering (26 - 33)

Vajra-Lasya	(Love-Play)
Vajra-Mala	(Garland)
Vajra-Gita	(Song)
Vajra-Natya	(Dance)
Vajra-Dupa	(Incense)
Vajra-Puspa	(Flower)
Vajra-Dipa	(Lamp)
Vajra-Gandha	(Scent)

4 Guardian Kings (34 - 37)

Vajra-mkusa	(Book)
Vajra-pasa	(Noose)
Vajra-sphota	(Fetter)
Vajra-vesa	(Penetration)

Mantra:

Omniscient One the Great Vajra-Born Worship of the...

...Perfection of Giving
...Perfection of Morality
...Perfection of Forebearance
...Perfection of Vigour
...Perfection of Meditation
...Perfection of Wisdom
...Perfection of Aspiration
...Perfection of Means

Omniscient One, ... (p18-19)

...the Evocator from the Gates of Hell
...the Rescuer from Hell
...the Deliverer from the Bonds of All Evils
...the Purifier of Impenetrable Darkness of All Evil Detinies

MI(a) BODDHISATTVAS, BHIKSUS, SAGES, AND WRATHFULS

16 Bodhisattvas (with mantra summary from p. 19, 56?)

"Further outside he draws the (Bodhi-)Sattvas, Maitreya and the other Great Ones." p. 66



Maitreya	<i>Conveyor of Benevolence</i>	Amrtaprabha	<i>Radiance of Immortality</i>
Amoghadarsin	<i>Infalible Beholder</i>	Candraprabha	<i>Beholder of the Moon</i>
Sarvapayajaha	<i>Destroyer and Purifier of All Evils</i>	Jaliniprabha	<i>Great Tracery of Light</i>
Sarvasokatamonirghatanmati	<i>Mind Removing Darkness of Sorrow</i>	Bhadrapala	<i>The Protector of Fortunate Ones</i>
Gandhahasti	<i>Lordly Elephant</i>	Vajragarbha	<i>Adamantine Essence</i>
Suramgama	<i>Heroic Performer</i>	Samantabhadra	<i>All-Good</i>
Gaganganja	<i>Heaven-Effulgence</i>	Pratibhanakuta	<i>Audacity-Foremost</i>
Jnanaketu	<i>Intelligent One, Possessed of Knowledge</i>	Aksayamati	<i>Undecaying Remover of Karma-Obstructions</i>

28 Monastic Figures

"Yet further outside he draws the Bhiksus, Ananda, etc, and the Sages"

- Section on the *Mandala of Cakravartin*, p66



"I shall fully enjoy every merit of all the ... Buddhas ... Bodhisattvas, Pratekya Buddhas, Sravakas, the Holy Ones, ... all the assemblies of living beings."

Section on the *Confession of Sins*, p24

"Arhats, Pratekyabuddhas, Rsis" *Vv 180-2-lff* p117

Since the section on the Cakravartin mandala describes the same set of 16 Bodhisattvas, 8 Goddesses, and 4 Guardians as the Sarvavid Mandala, its description is more likely predictive of the identity of the "budda-like" figures in the Sarvavid Vairocana Mandala.

Therefore, these figures are likely to be:

10 Bhiksus (disciples of the Buddha) + 16 Sages (Arhats) + 2 as of yet unidentified figures

Citations from: Skorupski, Tadeusz. *Durgati Parisodhana Tantra*. PhD Thesis. The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, 1983.



16 Wrathful Figures

These wrathful deities are yet to be identified. There are 4 wrathful figures with six arms each, and 12 wrathful figures with two arms.



(Above) Photograph of Verso

(Left)

Enhanced photograph of verso helps to see each figure of the painting is painstakingly consecrated in beautiful calligraphic writing.

Gold mark made underneath each consecration.

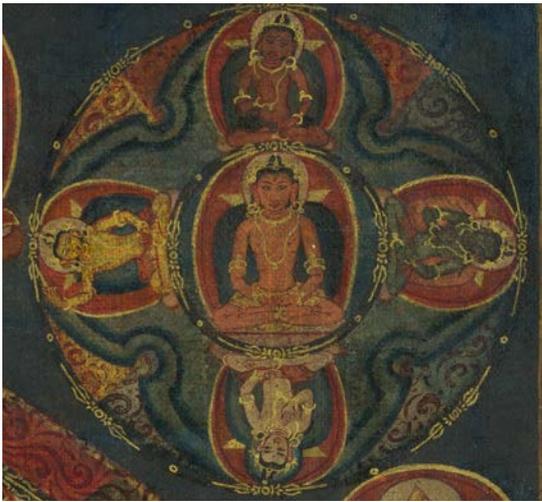


M2

ŚĀKYAMUNI MANDALA (BODY)

Inscribed: *shA kya thub pa sku'i dkyil 'khor*

C	Śākyamuni Buddha	Burning all Sins
E	Vajrapani	Purifying All Evils
S	Jayosnisa	Reduce to Ashes the Obstructions
W	Chakravartin	Destroy the Obstructions
N	Vijaya	Purify the Obstructions
SE	Tejorasi	Burn, Annihilate, Kill the Obstructions
NE	Sitatapatara	Overcome, Prevail Over the Obstructions
NW	Vikirina	Remove all the Obstructions
SW	Vidhvamsaka	Dispel all the Obstructions



M3

AMITAYUS MANDALA (SPEECH)

Inscribed: *tshē dpag med ...*

Center	Glorious King of the Totality of Unlimited Life: <i>Aparimitayuhṭpunyajnanasambharatejoraja</i>	
East	Vajrapani	
South	Akasagarbha	
West	The One Bestowing Fearlessness: <i>Avalokitesvara</i> as <i>Abhayamdada</i>	
North	Krodha	



M4

VAJRAPANI MANDALA (MIND)

Inscribed: *phyag na rdo rje thug kyi dkyi[l 'kh]or*

Center	Vajrapani
East	Akshobhya
South	Ratnasambhava
West	Amitabha
North	Amogasiddhi



M5

JVALANALA MANDALA (SPEECH)

Inscribed: *me lhar 'bar ba phrin las kyi dkyil 'khor*



M6

CHAKRAVARTIN MANDALA (QUALITIES)

Inscribed: *'khaur bsgyur ba yton gyi dkyi[il kh]or*

Center	Vajrapani
East	Vajrasattva
South	Ratnapani
West	Padmapani
North	Visvapani

DEITIES IN THE OUTER CIRCUMFERENCE, 74 (M7 – M12)

Numbered from 1 to 74 clock-wise, starting from the east (bottom)

"On the outside of that he draws Brahma and others accompanied by their consorts and entourage. He also draws in this mandala the Planets, the Lunar Mansions, the Four Kings, and the Guardians of the Directions..."

- Section on the *Mandala of Cakravartin*,

Skorupski, Tadeusz. *Durgati Parisodhana Tantra*. PhD Thesis. The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, 1983.

To assist in identifying figures belonging to the 9 *Bhairavas* and the 8 *Great Planets* and 28 *Lunar Mansions*, several comparisons are used. The first is the murals of Jampa Gompa, which as shown depict the complete iconographic cycle of 12 mandalas in the *Sarvadurgati Parisodana*.

Unlike in the murals, the figures in the outer circumference of this painting are truly miniature in size, with slight differences in the sizes of each of the arched enclave containing each figure. Therefore, whenever space constraints presented themselves, the artist has chosen to omit either a female consort couple (in the Bhairava ensemble) or an animal (in the Planets and Lunar Mansions ensembles) could not be depicted, and relying instead on the iconography of the figure alone. The artist has also chosen to, wherever possible, reduce iconographic overlap between figures belonging to different mandalas as to facilitate their differentiation.

Indra on elephant

Agni on goat

Yama on buffalo



9 Directional Guardians (*Dikapalas*)

Placement: 1, 10, 19, 28, 38, 39, 48, 57, 66



Raksha on zombie



Varuna on makara



Vayudeva on deer



Yaksha on horse



Ishani on buffalo



Brahma on goose

8 Great Serpet Kings (*Nagas*)

Mahoraga, Ananta, Taksaka, Karkota, Kulika, Vasuki, Samkhapala, Padma, and Varuna. p55

Placement: 7, 13, 18, 35, 44, 58, 65, 72



8 Great Gods (*Mahadevas*)

Placement: Animal head (42) Riding Goose (4) Unique Mudrās (12,14,17,22,54,71)

In reference to the 8 Great Gods, the text mentions Brahma (seated on a goose), entourage, and consorts. The depiction of the great gods here omits the consorts to save space, and to differentiate these figures from the 10 Guardians of the Directions. The figures selected below provide the closest match to the Great God Mandala at Jampa Gompa [East Wall, North Section #2], including the deity with an animal face, Brahma sitting on a goose, and close approximation of the mudrās shown therein for the remaining figures.



4 Heavenly Kings

(*Vaisravana, Dhrtarastra, Virudhaka, Virupaksa*)

Placement: 3,15,37,55



Vaisravana



Vaisravana



Vaisravana

Vaisravana

8 Great Planets

Sukra (*Venus*), Soma (*Moon*), Brhaspati (*Jupiter*), Vudha (*Mercury*), Angara (*Mars*), Aditya (*Sun*), Sanisoara (*Saturn*), Rahu (*Seizer of sun*)

Placement: Relaxed lotus (8, 68), Relaxed lotus in profile (32, 61), Riding Animals (27, 59), Vitarka Mudrā (25, 43)



x2



x2



x2



...with 28 Lunar Mansions (*Naksatras*)

Relaxed lotus ×8 (6,20,24,31,40,46,63,69)

Relaxed lotus in profile ×9 (2,9,21,23,29,34,47,53,64)

Vitarka Mudrā ×6 (5,11,30,41,51,67)

Riding Animals ×5 (36,49,50,56,74)



x8



x9



x6



9 Bhairavas

Placement: Couples (26, 60, 70), Unique Postures (33,52,62,73), Vitarka Mudrā (16, 45)

The 15th century murals at the Jampa Gompa [East Wall, North Section #3] depict all of the Bhairavas seated as couples, and not depicted as wrathful figures. The three figures seated as couples in this mandala are identified as Bhairavas. Four figures with unique postural modification (which likely signify the presence of a consort) - are also assigned to this mandala. Finally, two figures depicted in *vitarka mudrā* and seated in *padmasana* complete the assembly (out of the total of nine with this mudrā).



THE IMMOVABLE ONE, ACALANĀTHA

14th century, Tibet

17.8 *h* × 13.4 *w* × 4.8 *d* cm

Bronze alloy with copper inlay

Deeply synergistic with the previous work, the wrathful Acala is described in the 8th century *Vairocanabhisambodhi Sutra*¹, as a remover of karmic obstacles, as one who burns away impediments arising from within and from without.

Powerfully and energetically portrayed, Acala stands here ready to fulfill his destiny, yet with a compassion suggested by his perfectly balanced and well-proportioned form. Central to this balance is the angle of the face: the leftwards roll of the face creates just enough movement for the viewer's gaze to move toward the proper left arm, while its downwards pitch creates just enough movement for the viewer's gaze to complete its journey towards the *mudrā* of Acala's proper left hand. The raised index finger then points to its dynamic counterbalance: the sword held in Acala's proper right hand, symbolic of cutting through the fog of ignorance with wisdom. Acala is no mere fixer of problems, he is an *enlightened* wrathful deity, one who subjugated the two Hindu deities, Maheśvara and Umādevā and converted them with his wisdom². A snake wrapping diagonally around the front and back, emerges with his face near Acala's face on the proper left - an ordinary mortal might feel a pang of terror at the prospect, but this is natural and comfortable for Acala. His teeth are bared as a sign of his menacing nature (to his foes). The large, rounded copper-inlaid eyes embody the energy contained within this form and his wrathful nature. His wrath is not an existential threat, but a conduit.

Stylistically, diamond-shaped motifs feature prominently. Acala's crown is composed of three studs, the ones on the sides being elongated diamonds, while the center piece is a large lotus flower. Acala's hair is rendered with around 30 diamond shaped bunches, each of which is inscribed with diagonally oriented strands of hair and traces of blue pigment residue. The third eye too, takes a diamond shape. The eyebrows have a unique wave-like rippling undulation as they extend outwards from the third eye. The earrings are large, hollow, roundels, while two additional discoid ornaments decorated with an eight petaled lotus hang over the hear from the crown. And from behind the ears, are pieces of cloth decorated with an small circular pattern, one flowing down from shoulder and the other electrified upwards.

1 Translation by Geibel, Rolf. W. *Vairocanabhisambodhi Sutra*. Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai and Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research. California, 2005.

2 Linrothe, Rob. *Ruthless Compassion*. Serindia Publications, London. 1998.





THE REMOVER OF OBSTACLES, SARVANIVĀRAṆAṆAṆIṢKAMBHIN

First half of the 17th century, Kingdom of Lo Mantang

16.4 *h* × 11.2 *w* × 7.8 *d* cm

Bronze alloy with copper and silver inlay

Inscribed along base

ཨ་སྐྱེ། བྱང་ལྷོ་སེམས་དཔའ་སྐྱིབ་པ་རྣམ་སེལ་ལ་སྐྱག་འཚལ་ཞིང་སྐྱབས་སུ་མཆོའོ།
ཚོས་ལྷོ་བསམ་གྲུབ་རྗེ་རྗེའི་སྐྱགས་དགོངས་རྗེས་པར་གྱུར་ཅིག། མཁྲ་ལོ།

Om Svasti! Boddhisattva Sarvanivāraṇaṇiṣkambhin, I prostrate to, and take refuge in you.
May the intentions of Dharma King Samdrub Dorje be fulfilled. Mangalam!

Sarvanivāraṇaṇiṣkambhin is one of the 8 Great Boddhisattva that has the capacity to **completely remove all obstacles**. The iconographic form (holding a wish-fulfilling jewel) found in this sculpture is described in the the esoteric text *Vairocanaḥisambodhi Sutra*¹ (which was composed prior to 680CE²). Depictions of this Boddhisattva are rare, and are mostly found in painting as part of the Mahavairocana mandala, or in sculpture as part of a set of the Eight Great Boddhisattvas. Based on the inscription on the base, this work was made for the funerary rites of the King Samdrub Dorje of Lo Manthang (active early in the 17th century). The removal of obstacles is therefore in reference to an auspicious rebirth of the King and his path to *nirvāṇa* in said rebirth³.

King Samdrub Dorje, in addition to writing a genealogy of the ruling house of Lo⁴, also "erected at Tsarang the Thub-bstan-sgrub-dar-rgyas-gling main temple hall (gtsug lag khang) which was excellent in its distinctive features and its pictorial decorations."⁵, and in which "are painted with murals depicting the deities of the Medicine Buddha mandala."⁶. The oral history recorded in the *Tsarang Molla* claim both King Samdrub Dorje and his son King Samdrub Rabten to be exceptional patrons of the arts⁷, implicitly placing them second only to the the 15th century Lo Kings, Ame Pel (*a me dpal*) and his son Agon Zangpo (*a mgon bzang po*)⁸ who patronized Ngorchen and commissioned the murals of Jampa Gompa and Thubchen Lhakang.

Stylistically, this piece is reminiscent of a sculpture of Ngari Panchen Pema Wangyel as Avalokiteshvara, made by the Newar sculptor Abhaya Jyoti in 1543 (presently part of the Rockefeller Collection at the Asia Society, New York)⁹. Both works though mostly following the style of the Tsang Atelier (of particular note are the style of the lotus base, the predominance of incision)¹⁰ are distinguished by distinctively Pala style features, such as: prominently articulated braids of hair that knot into a crown over the head and that drape over the shoulders, the exquisitely lyrical shape of the lotus stem, the pieces of dhoti hanging down from the waistline and over the shoulder, the thick and well-articulated webbed fingers¹¹. This work has beautifully elongated and slit-like eyes, inlaid with copper and silver, that are emblematic of its Western Tibetan provenance. Finally, amongst the clouds on *Sarvanivāraṇaṇiṣkambhin* clothes, six of the 7 Precious Gems of the *Cakravartin* are inscribed (excluding the King's earrings).

1 Geimbel, Rolf (Transalted). *The Vairocanaḥisambodhi Sutra*. BDK America, 2006.

2 Davidson, Ronald. *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: Social History of the Tantric Movement*. Columbia University Press, New York, 2002. page 118

3 This intended message is similar to the *Sarvadurgati Parisodhana* (Elimination of all Evil Destinies).

4 Heimbel, Jörg. *Vajradhara in Human Form: The Life and Times of 'Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po*. Lumbini International Research Institute, 2017. See Blo bo chos rgyal rim byon rgyal rab mu thi li'i 'phreng mdzes on p272

5 Jackson, David P. *The Mollas of Mustang: Historical, Religious and Oratorical Traditions of the Nepalese-Tibetan Borderland* (Dharmasala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1984). <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Translation+of+the+Tsarang+Molla+history+of+the+Lo+rulers.-a0322027115>

6 Watt, Jeff. *Region: Mustang, Charang (Town)*. *Himalayan Art Resources*. <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=2321>

7 Jackson, David P. *The Mollas of Mustang: Historical, Religious and Oratorical Traditions of the Nepalese-Tibetan Borderland* (Dharmasala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1984). <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Translation+of+the+Tsarang+Molla+history+of+the+Lo+rulers.-a0322027115>

8 Ibid

9 Bue, Erberto Lo (ed.) Heller, Amy. *Portable Buddhist Sculptures of Lo: A chronological Selection, 15th through 17th Centuries*. *Wonders of Lo: The Artistic Heritage of Mustang*. Marg Foundation, Mumbai, 2010.

10 Watt, Jeff. *Sculpture: Tsang Province Atelier, Tibet*. *Himalayan Art Resources*. <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=3556>

11 This general style of sculptures dates back to at least the 15th, where it was used for a figure of Maitreya made for the Gyantse Prince Rabten Kunzang. It appears that this style is predominantly used for funerary commissions of Boddhisattvas. We now have one from the





THE BODDHISATTVA OF WISDOM, MAÑJUŚRĪ

14-15th century, Tibet

11.6 *h* × 8.0 *w* × 7.0 *d* cm

Bronze alloy with traces of mercuric gilding

Inscribed along base

རྗེ་བཙུན་འཇམ་དཔལ་དབྱངས་ལ་ན་མོ། བདག་དཔལ་འབར་རྗེས་སུ་བརྒྱང་དུ་གསོལ།

Homage to Mañjuśrī. Please take me, the flame of the glorious (Pelbar), under your care.

Mañjuśrī, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, is depicted iconically, with hands in *dharmacakra mudra*, each holding lotus stems with *utpala* flowers supporting the symbols of wisdom (sword and book). Several stylistic features are of note. The strap going around the waist is bound at the knee with a piece of cloth that hangs down to the ankle. Thin horizontal striations accentuate the jewel studded belt and other jewelery hanging from the waist. The third eye (*urna*) is a long rectangle, and the thick chainlike braids of hair are knotted into a crown, while one braid hang down the front, a thick braid to either side, and three braids together straight down the back. Multiple pieces of cloth hang from the waist on the backside, one to either side, and a loop and a singlet from the center. This work is stylistically extremely similar to a bronze depicting the Bodhisattva Maitreya in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco¹. The second line of the inscription is identical as well. The two works, however, are not from the same set, as evidenced by (a) the difference in size (14cm vs 12 cm height), (b) the difference in the alloy composition, (c) the presence of gold pigment on the present work, (d) the flatter rendering of the utpala flowers here. This work may be slightly earlier than the 15th century work. The phrase *dpal 'bar* refers symbolically to person who commissioned the work, making reference to their role in leading people; reading *bdag* as the royal I, it is likely that the work was commissioned by a pious king (*chos rgyal*). There likely existed a tradition of patronage of icons of Bodhisattvas in this particular style, starting from the 14th-15th century, and extending to the 18th century².

1 *The Buddha Maitreya*. Asian Art Museum, San Francisco. [http://asianart.emuseum.com/view/objects/asitem/items\\$0040:11459](http://asianart.emuseum.com/view/objects/asitem/items$0040:11459)

2 This "tradition" includes the statue of Sarvanivāraṇaviṣkambhin (this catalog, 17th century), and the Avalokitesvara sculpture (16th century) of Ngari Panchen, the bronze on HAR (15th c) a silver cast Maitreya made at Gyantse in the mid-15th century, and works listed at <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=4145>





JAMBHALA, THE PROGENITOR OF WEALTH

ca. 1300, Central Tibet

15.3 *h* × 10.2 *w* × 7.1 *d* cm

Bronze with copper and silver inlay

ནོར་གྱི་དབང་འཕུག་རིན་ཆེན་རྟེན་མང་ཞིང་། གཞོན་ཕྱིན་ནོར་འཆང་མ་དཔོ་ཀུན་གྱི་བྱེ།
བྱང་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱིང་བའི་འགོན་པོ་འཛམ་བོ་ལ་ད་དོག་གྲུབ་ཕྱོག་བླ་མ་འཛད་པའི་བཀའ་ཤིས་ཤོག། མགོན་པོ་ཇམ་གླེ་ལ་ན་མོ།

Jambhala, the lord of wealth,
the creator of all wealth holding Yakshas,
the lord protector of the northern direction, who bestows supreme attainment,
may there be auspiciousness. I prostrate to lord Jambhala!

Trans. Karma Gelek

Yellow Jambhala is a wealth deity of the Ratnasambhava (Jewel) family. He holds a medicinal fruit known as citron (*bijapuraka*) in his right hand, and a wealth generating mongoose in his left. The mongoose is cast with lavish attention, as the hairs on its body individually articulated. Seated in a relaxed lotus posture, Jambhala's right foot rests on a vase of long life emerging from a lotus stem. The lotus also contains a conch shell near the left foot, and symbolizes the dissemination of the Buddha's teachings.

Compared to most images of Jambhala, this representation of Jambhala has been embellished with considerable additional symbolism. The central tip of the five tipped crown has been replaced with a wish-fulfilling gem, while the remaining four tips contain a pair of fish (the auspicious symbol for happiness). Interestingly, all 7 Precious Jewels – possessions of a *cakravartin* ruler – have been inscribed near the base. These are commonly found as offerings in paintings, but it is rare to find them inscribed on bronze sculptures. Of these symbols, the jewel symbolizing the Precious General occupies a prominent position on the front face of the right foot, while the others are inconspicuously rendered along the top surface of the seat of the lotus.

Amongst other stylistic elements, the simplified asterix pattern on the scarf (seen from the backside of the piece), the prominent crown with strong triangular forms, and the diamond shaped earrings suggest that this piece dates to 13–14th centuries.





NĀROḌĀKINĪ

15th century. Tibet

18.6h × 12.7w × 8.8 d cm

Bronze alloy with mercuric gilding

Nāroḍākinī is the name of the female tantric practitioner who appeared to the 11th century Mahasiddha, Nāropa, and revealed to him numerous teachings as an emanation of Vajrayogini. She is closely associated with the Six Yogas of Nāropa, as well as the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* and *Vajravārāhī Tantra*. This work was published in *Wisdom and Compassion - The Sacred Art of Tibet*¹.

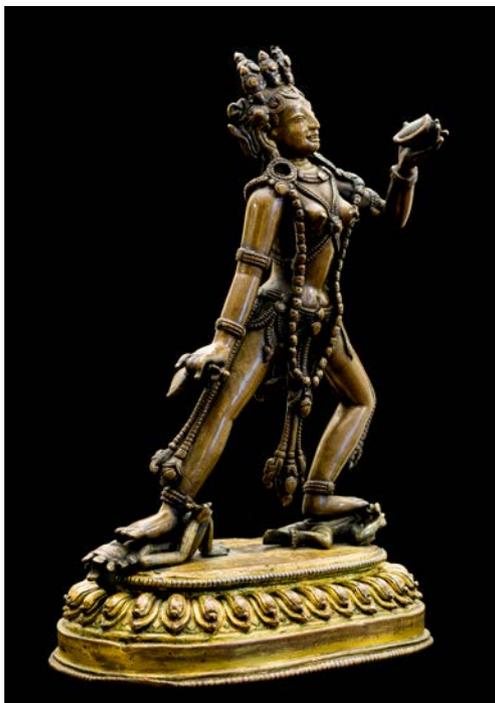
This bronze is very finely cast, with a supple and lithe form complementing Nāroḍākinī's delighted and enlightened gaze as she drinks blood from a skullcup (*kapala*) with her slightly open smile revealing her teeth. In her right hand, she holds a *vajra* chopper. A third eye indicates her status and access to all of the teachings of the Buddha, and her long hair is a mark of her accomplishment as a yogini, wherein she has "purified..the arterial network that carries the inner breath energy through the subtle yogic anatomy."²

The many items of jewellery adorning her form are crafted in a Densatil style of the 15th century³. Her necklace is fastened between the breasts, before continuing around the midriff to the hidden fastening point between her shoulder blades. Other pendants – teardrop, square, and round – adorn the looping jewelry hanging from her waist and wrapping around her buttocks. The longer jeweled forms, running down the length of her two legs and straight down from her waist are provided with finials of gems supported by vegetal scrolls and stems. Her necklace of skulls drapes down to the middle of her thighs, delicately resting to the sides of her navel along the way. Her smaller necklace, armband, and bracelets are studded with many small jewels, and accentuated by a handful of large, narrow rectangular gemstones that are perpendicularly aligned with the bands of smaller jewels running along the length of the pieces of jewelry. The work is a masterpiece in craftsmanship, sublime in refinement and aesthetic.

1 Rhie, Marilyn M. and Robert A.F. Thurman. *Wisdom and Compassion - The Sacred Art of Tibet*.

2 Shaw, Miranda Eberle. *Buddhist Goddesses of India*. Princeton University Press, 2006.

3 Czaja, Olaf and Adriana Proser. *Golden Visions of Densatil: A Tibetan Buddhist Monastery*. Asia Society Museum, New York.





THE DISPELLER OF MISERY ŚOKAVINODANA TĀRĀ

Late 15th century, Kingdom of Guge

Distemper on silk, 43h × 27w cm

Śokavinodana Tārā is one of the twenty-one forms of the Tārā described in the *Tārādevi-stotra-ekaviṃśatika-sādhana-nāma* of the 7th-8th century Indian monastic figure, Suryagupta¹. It was in this period of medieval Indian history that Tārā took on a meaning beyond the meditational context, and become known as perfected female Buddha². Of the many forms this perfected Buddha can take, the one found here, Śokavinodana Tārā, is the dispeller of sorrow and misery. Her iconography depiction encodes the means by which the removal of sorrow takes place.

In her two lower pair of arms, outstretched, she holds a sword and a branch of the aśoka tree. The bark of the aśoka tree has medicinal value, and is a symbol for the the removal of misery induced by illness. In this context, the sword signifies dispelling ignorance, and so, it can be read as a symbol for the removal of misery as caused by ignorance (*avidya*).³ The second pair of hands performs the distinctive and uncommon *vajracakra mudrā* (adamantine circle gesture), which symbolizes Mount Meru. In Buddhism, Mount Meru is not only a cosmological structure but also concurrently the abode of the primordial Buddha Vairocana and a meditational space within the practitioner⁴. As of such, it can be understood as a place of transformation where one realizes singular truth pervading both self and world: a place where both ignorance and suffering are removed.

This painting is one of the nine paintings extant from the set of twenty one. All of the paintings were made on silk cloth, and have an elegant and well-coordinated use of color. A dazzling array of motifs are found in the aureoles, textiles, and the lotus seats. Attribution of the set to Guge was first made by Hugo Kreiger on the basis of a comparison with the late-15th century murals at Tholing⁵. Patrons in Guge had a particular proclivity not just towards Tara, but specifically towards depiction of the 21 Tārās elucidated by Suryagupta⁶. This set of paintings is made in the style of painting that developed in Guge in the late-15th century, following its independence from Central Tibet in the first half of the century, a style that is often called the revival Kashmiri style for the intense stylistic similarities with the local artistic traditions from the 10th-12th centuries. This "revival" was not an imitation of the earlier style but a resurgent adaptation of its many distinctive features, and it does not preclude⁷ a concurrent persistence of Beri stylistic influences. Characteristic features of this 15th painting revival Kashmiri style at sites such as Tabo and Tholing can be seen in textile patterns, long sinuous ribbons of cloth hanging down from the shoulders, body proportions, modeling and contours of the face⁸. Note the startling and remarkable similarities between this work with an eleventh century mural of a goddess at Tabo, despite the 400+ years between them⁹. Also, the particular cloud pattern on Tārā's sari is identical to that found in numerous paintings from Guge, including a large work of Amitabha Buddha in the Museo Nazionale de Roma which was explicitly made in the *kha che lugs* (Kashmiri style of Guge)¹⁰.



L-R: Uṣṇīṣavijaya, Maṅgalāvabhasa, Duḥkadahana, Paripūraṇa, Gauri, Raganisudana, Paripācana and Calad-bhṛkuṭī Tara. *Jucker Sale*, Sotheby's, 2006. Lots 72 - 80.

1 Bayer, Stephan. *The Cult of Tara: Magic and Ritual in Tibet*. University of California Press, 1978. Page 469

2 Shaw, Miranda Eberle. *Buddhist Goddesses of India*. Princeton University Press, 2006.

3 Concurrent with the articulation of these 21 forms of Tārā was a maturity of the articulation - primarily in advaita philosophy - that ignorance (*avidya*) is the sole and true cause for suffering

4 Huntington, John C. and Dina Bangdel. *The Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art*. Serindia Publications, London, 2003. Pages 428 and 66

5 Kreijger, Hugo E. *Tibetan Painting: The Jucker Collection*. Serindia Publications, London, 2001.

6 See Himalayan Art Resources (www.himalayanart.org), items 15890, 60681, 68897

7 Jackson, David. *Painting Traditions of the Drigung Kagyu School*. Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2014.

8 Kerin, Melissa. *Art and Devotion at a Buddhist Temple in the Indian Himalaya*. Indiana University Press, 2014. See image on p184. Also, compare the motifs in Fig. 5.5 to 5.8

9 Kerin, Melissa. *Art and Devotion at a Buddhist Temple in the Indian Himalaya*. Indiana University Press, 2014. See image on p184. Also, compare the motifs in Fig. 5.5\

10 Klimberg-Salter, Deborah. *Discovering Tibet*. Asia Society Press, New York, 2018.





DRAPA NGONSHE JAMBHALA IN PARADISE

17th century, Central Tibet
Distemper on cloth, 69.9 h × 56.2 w cm



This rare form of the Wealth Granting Deity, Red Jambhala was discovered by one of Tibet's earliest Tertöns, Drapa Ngonshe (*grwa pa mngon she*, 1012 – 1090). Drapa Ngonshe "is credited with having built over one hundred temples, made possible by his meditation on 'Dzam.bha.la' [Jambhala], which enabled him to 'attain the power of obtaining the treasure of gold to drive out misery'".¹ The weight of gold is felt by every square centimeter of the painting, emphasizing Jambhala's presence here as a wealth deity. Specifically, not only are the prominent rooftops in Amitabha's paradise of Sukhavati and the solar disk of Jambhala's lotus painted in gold, but all of the patterning is done in gold outline, including the densely undulating cloud patterns on the ultramarine sky, the tips of leaves adorning bulbous trees, the foliate scrolling on the architectural panels and cloth, and outlining and highlighting of iconographic elements in the painting. Wealth is also apparent from the jewels that overflow from the terraces, eventually accumulating on the floors beneath. These jewels are accompanied by groupings of the 8 Auspicious Symbols, 7 Jeweled Insignia of a *Cakravartin*, and the 5 Attributes of Sensory Enjoyment.

Drapa Ngonshe is credited with the discovery on July 19, 1038 at Samye Monastery of a text called *Great Tantra of Secret Instructions on the Eight Branches of the Essence of the Glorious Elixir of Immortality*, which after redaction was known as the *Four Tantras* and the basis of the Tibetan medical tradition². Drapa Ngonshe was also responsible for commencing the construction of the Dratang Monastery, though he passed away prior to its completion. Dratang is known for its incredible murals, including early rendering of Śākyamuni and 16 Arhats, and numerous incredible standing sculptures of Bodhisattvas³. The teacher, wearing what is most likely a Tertön's lotus hat, sits at the topmost place in Amitabha's Sukhavati, even higher than Amitabha himself. Therefore, the identity of this teacher is probably Drapa Ngonshe, who is the revealer of the entire scene that is depicted⁴. This is at least consistent with his iconographic depiction: he holds Amitabha's alms bowl in his proper left hand to signify his accomplished status, and forms the teaching gesture (*vitarka mudrā*) his right hand indicating his role in promulgation of these teachings. The iconographic significance of the hat's red-colored body (as opposed to the usual blue / multicolored) will be discussed later.

This Jambhala holds a hook and lasso, which symbolize drawing people towards the *dharma* and binding them to the *dharma*, respectively. A wish fulfilling gem is held at the heart center alongside a skullcup (*kapala*) filled with jewels. Finally, in his lower pair of hands he holds a pair of auspicious mongooses spewing gems. Jambhala's hair is wrapped into a metaphoric crown. He also wears an actual gold and jewel-studded crown gold that is capped with a wish-fulfilling gem. Instead of the usual garland of flowers or gems, the beads of his necklace contain the Two Fish motif, which is the auspicious symbol for happiness. Complementing this wealth, his power over nature is implied by the 8 Great Snakes spiraling around his torso. His red color symbolizes his affiliation with the Amitabha buddha family, and in fact, the vast majority of depictions of this Red Jambhala, he is accompanied by both Amitabha and Kurukulla. The depiction of Red Jambhala in Sukhavati is extremely unique and rare.

This semi-wrathful depiction of Jambhala is provided with a double body aureole, one filled with rays of light, and the other is filled with flaming scrollwork. Jambhala's dynamic posture had been modified to fit his body into the central aureole, specifically by bending the upper pair of hands inwards towards the head and bringing the lower pair of hands over the navel. All of the roof ridge endings above Jambhala are accentuated by branching vegetal scrolls. Extremely prominent dragon heads have been used as ornaments on four of the roof ridge endings, with highly elaborate vegetal scrolls emerging from their mouths. The paradise is completely encased with dense trees, rendered simply with bunches of small gold-tipped leaves, and each decorated with hanging jewels, a pair of branches and a

1 Vitali, Roberto. *Early Temples of Central Tibet*. Serindia Publications, London. 1990. page 39

2 Taye, Jamgon Kongrul Lodro. *The Treasury of Knowledge*. Shambhala Publications, 2012.

3 Vitali, Roberto. *Early Temples of Central Tibet*. Serindia Publications, London. 1990. page 39. See Chapter 2 for reproductions of the art at Dratang.

4 One valid iconographic question is why the teacher is seated on a cushion (as the painting is quite evidently made after Drapa Ngonshe passed away in the 11th century). The reason for this is that the teacher is not seated in the sky, or on the earth, but inside Sukhavati itself. Sukhavati is not a place for mortals, rather part of its mythology is rooted in it being a place to reside in after death.



pair of miniature birds. An extremely thin layer of green clouds blankets the upper third of the paradise. The sky contains a unique and rare "cloud" scrolling pattern with a high degree of branching. The relative sparseness of the cloud scrolling is complemented by golden dots to fill space.

Most known paintings of Drapa Ngonshe's Red Jambhala are stylistically Eastern Tibetan, date to the 18th century or later, and predominantly of a Kagyu/Nyingma lineage⁵. The timing and religious affiliation of these paintings appears to be consistent with a documented transmission lineage, in which the teachings for the Red Jambhala are transmitted from Taranatha to a Drukpa abbot at Tsibri in Western Tibet, then to Dechen Chokor in Central Tibet circa 1640, then to Drukpa teachers in Eastern Tibet (Khampa Gar, circa 1700), and finally to 8th Tai Situpa, Chökyi Jungne and Drukpa teachers at Dzigar Chogar in the mid-18th century (See Table 1). Since most known works paintings of Drapa Ngonshe's Jambhala are made in Eastern Tibet in the mid-18th to early 20th century, they were plausibly commissioned by branches of this transmission lineage. In contrast with the other works, this work stylistically most likely originates from Central Tibet somewhere between the early-17th to mid-18th century. If the work was to originate from the transmission lineage in Table 1, this would imply a mid- to late-17th century date for the work.

The all-red lotus hat of Drapa Ngonshe is an important iconographic clue, as the body of most lotus hats have a blue-colored body. My hypothesis is that its all-red color means that the person who commissioned the work a disciple of, or at least held in high esteem, someone who wore an all-red Tertön hat. The only teachers I could find wearing an all red Tertön hat was the late-15th notably Pema Lingpa⁶, and the 16th century teachers Drigung Rinchen Phuntsok, Tashi Tobgyel, Sherab, Özer. This would suggest that the painting was not made later than the 17th century. This analysis at least indicates the painting was made in a Nyingma tradition within a Kagyu (either Drukpa or Drigung) sphere of influence.

In conclusion, the work can be stylistically dated to somewhere between the early-17th to mid-18th century, though based on the lineal and iconographic considerations above, the balance of probability suggests at 17th century date is more likely.

Table 1: Summary of transmission lineage for Red Jambhala (TBRC [L8LS15009](#))

Taranatha	1575–1634	
Sanggye Dorje	1569–1645	Tsibri Monastery, Western Tibet
Kunga Lhundrup	1616–1675	Dechen Chokor, Central Tibet
Mipham Chokyi Wangchuk	1639–1703	Dechen Chokor, Central Tibet
Gelek Shadpa	1677–1719	Dechen Chokor, Central Tibet
Kunga Tenzin	1680–1728	Khampa Gar, Eastern Tibet
Chogyal Gyatso		
Dorje Drakpo Tsal	1740–1798	Dzigar Chogar, Eastern Tibet
Situ 8, Chökyi Jungne	1600–1774	Palpung, Eastern Tibet
Chökyi Nyima		Dzigar Chogar

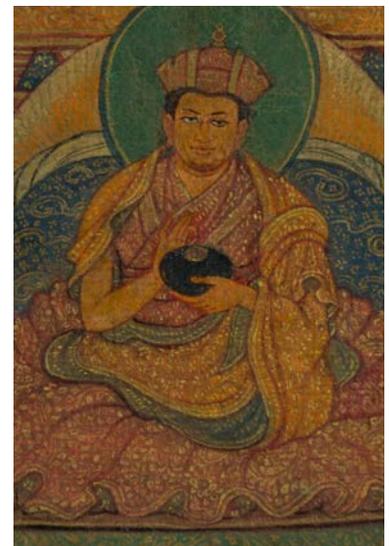


Fig. 1: Detail of Drapa Ngonshe

5 Watt, Jeff. *Buddhist Deity: Jambhala, Red (Trapa Ngonshe)*. Himalayan Art Resources. <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=1409>. 20 Dec 2018. See in particular, HAR IDs 199, 970, 65320,98983, and 93787.

6 If one permits some degree of fluidity, then one might also include Pema Lingpa's Gangteng lineage of Nyingma teachers in the Drukpa in the realm of possible *priors*. See the individual teachers on Treasury of Lives (the earliest of which is Pema Trinle): <https://treasuryoflives.org/incarnation/Gangteng>



THE KNOWLEDGE-CAUSING MOTHER KURUKULLA

Circa 1765, Commissioned by Migyur Gyaltzen, Kham, Eastern Tibet

74.9 h × 48.3 w cm (image)

Distemper on cloth

In this work, Kurukulla, the semi-wrathful Knowledge-Causing Mother, emanates an enchanting and lyrical aura. Her semi-wrathful nature embodied by the seeming paradox embodied by her flower-formed bow. Her inner body aureole exudes light rays from her peaceful nature, and outer body aureole renders her wrathful nature with the scrollwork of flames. Her dynamism and fiery skin color is softened by the triangular framing with peonies near her knees and the peach-surrounded Amitabha buddha above. The sadhana and description of this Kurukulla is given in the *Hevajra Tantra*¹, and consequently, Hevajra is found at the topmost position in the painting, with lineage teachers bracketing him on either side.

Of the remaining deities in this painting, consisting of four (Naro Khacho, Tinuma, Red Vasudhara and Kurukulla Garbhasuvarnasutra Sri) belong to a group of deities known as the 13 Golden Dharmas of Sakya². The painting thus belongs to a set of three, whose central figures are Kurukulla (C), Takkiraja (R1), and Ganesha³ (L1). A Green Tara and the Wisdom Protector Cittipati⁴ round off the ensemble of deities. depicted herein. The cloth backing of the brocade over the hanging rod does not provide the hanging order, inscribing only the deity's name, *rig byed [ma]*.

At the bottom right, an inscription reveals the Sakya lama who commissioned the set to be none other than Sharchen Migyur Gyaltzen (born in 1717). In addition to serving as the 37th Abbot of the Ngor Monastery from 1746 – 1751, Migyur Gyaltzen also spent time at Derge, where he conferred teachings upon the King and served as court chaplain⁵. He was an important patron of the arts, and "according to the annals, during his [Migyur Gyaltzen] stay at Derge, several paintings were made for him in the workshop of Zhu-chen (Zhuchen Tsultrim). Zhu-chen died in 1769, leaving a maximal span of 18 years for the collaboration"⁶. Each diety is inscribed in poetic and elaborate inscriptions characteristic of those composed by Zhuchen Tshultrim Rinchen⁷.

One of the several laborers standing near Migyur Gyaltzen and his attendants holds a replica of a monastery as an offering. This monastery may be an allusion to Lhagyal Gon monastery, which Migyur Gyaltzen founded in 1767, suggesting that perhaps this painting may have been commissioned soon after the completion of the monastery.

1/13 **Kurukulla**: *yid 'phrog sphyan gis zur mda' yis | [2]'i dpal gyis khengs [1] lha snying | bsnun pa'i yong de [1] dbang bsdu nas | dge lam legs sbyor rigs byed ma*

6/13 Vajrayogini, Naropa: *gsang gsum sgom zlos skal btsun | mkha'i sphyod 'grid pa'i rnal 'byor ma*

7/13 Kurukulla-Tara: *skye dgra'i brtan pa yongs dbrog pa'i | dpal mo gser gyi snying thig can* (HAR 40396)

8/13 Vasudhara: *sde bzhi chu skyes bcud sdud byed | nor gyun lus phra'i sbrang rtse'i mgrin* (HAR 40397)

9/13 Vajrayogini, Tinuma: *kham gsum dpal 'byor dbang 'byor ba'i | dngos grub cher myur ti nu ma* (HAR 40398)

A Hevajra: *stong nyid snying rjes brtan gyo'i dngos | kun khyab dgyes mdzad he ru ka*

B Amitabha

C Tara *rgyal kun phrin las mtshar sdug gar | srid zhi'i 'jigs skyob sgtol ma yum*

D Shri Shamasana Adhipati:

p1 Raja Sahajalalita (*rgyal po lhan skyes rol pa*)

p2 Mahavajrasana (*rdo rje gdan pa*)

p3 Rinchen Grag (*ba ri lo tsa ba*)

p4 - p8 Curtailed lineage L1RKL2691

p9 Sharchen Mingyur Gyeltsen: *chos gdams pa bdud rtsi'i dpal yongs 'dzin shar pa mi 'gyur mtshan*

	p3	p1	A	p2	p4	
p7	p5					p6 p8
			B			
6						C
			1			
7						8
9						
			D			p9

1 Snellgrove, David. *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study Part I: Introduction and Translation*. London Oriental Series. School of Oriental and African Studies. 1959.

2 Dhongthog Rinpoche. *The Sakya School of Tibetan Buddhism*. Simon and Schuster, 2016.

3 Watt, Jeff. *Ganapati (Indian God & Buddhist Deity) - Red (12 hands)*. Himalayan Art Resources. <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/89906>

4 Watt, Jeff. *Buddhist Protector: Shmashana Adhipati (Chitipati)*. Himalayan Art Resources. <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=160>

5 Doje, Sonam. *The Twelfth Derge King, Lodro Gyatso*. Treasury of Lives. <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Lodro-Gyatso/P9187>

6 Ernst, Richard. *Science and Art, My Two Passions*. https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/chab/chab-dept/departement/images/Emeriti/richard_ernst/Publications/Science_and_Art-My_Two_Passions.pdf

7 Jackson, David. *A History Of Tibetan Paintings*. Verlag-Presage Publications. 1992.





FORM III
TIBETAN TECHNOLOGIES OF SELF

KARMAPA 3 RANGJUNG DORJE (1284 - 1339)

14th century. Tibet
12.5 h × 9.5 w × 6.5 d cm
Gilt bronze with silver inlay

**The sole all-knowing one
Taught sentient beings from his realization
That these three realms are merely mind:
They neither arise from themselves, nor from something other,
Nor from both, nor without a cause¹**

The 3rd Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje was a prodigious master. Early in his life, he received tantric teachings from the *Zhijie* & *Cho*, *Kālacakra*, *Dzogchen*, and *Mahamudrā* traditions and studied extensively in the sutras, including the *Pramāṇa*, *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Madhyamaka*, *Abhidharmakośa*, and *Vinaya*². He is also known for having been invited to the Yuan court, and having mediated in the succession dispute that led to the enthronement of Töghan Temür.³

This bronze portrait finds the 3rd Karmapa seated with both hands resting besides his knees, a posture known as the "mind refreshing" (*sems nyid ngal so*)⁴. He dons the emblematic Black Hat of the Karmapa lineage, with a sun, moon, diamond (for a double *dorje*), and a thickness characteristic of the early heirarchs of this lineage. The silver inlay for the beaded hems of his robes perfectly complement their simplicity: at once conveying his thoughtful clarity and his status. The work's venerable status is accentuated with the soot of incense and carbon of fire to attest signifying age and triumph over hardship.

Rangjung Dorje can be said to an important precursor and motivation for the kind of concurrence and coexistence of the lineages outlined in the *8 Chariots of Spiritual Accomplishment*. He was an important teacher to Dolpopa Sherab Gyeltsen who was a proponent of "Other Emptiness" (Zhengtong). As Rangjung Dorje probably learned the *rdo rje gsum gyi bsnyen sgrub* from his teacher Orgyen Nyendrub, and as the *Lamrim* was been integrated into the Karma Kagyu tradition as preparation for the *Mahamudrā*, he came close to having mastered all of the lineages (the only one missing is the *Lamdre*).



1 Brunnholzl, Karl. *Luminous Heart: The Third Karmapa on Consciousness, Wisdom, and Buddha Nature*. Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, NY, 2009.

2 Gardner, Alexander. *The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje*. Treasury of Lives. <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Third-Karmapa-Rangjung-Dorje/9201>

3 Gardner, Alexander. *The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje*. Treasury of Lives. <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Third-Karmapa-Rangjung-Dorje/9201>

4 Dinwiddie, Donald. *Portraits of the Masters*. Serindia Publications, London, 2003.



TERTÖN SHERAB ÖZER (1518 – 1584)

1579 – 1602

Chonggye Valley, Central Tibet

Distemper on cloth, 66.0 h × 50.8 w cm

Sherab Özer (sanskrit: *Prajñārasmi*) was a highly esteemed scholar and treasure revealer (Tertön) of the 16th century. As a scholar, he trained extensively in the traditions of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism and developed a nuanced understanding of the foundational viewpoints and logical methodologies of each. Transcending the sectarian politics of his time, one of his greatest achievements was the articulation of a philosophical framework that known as the *8 Chariots of Spiritual Accomplishment*¹. In it, he condenses all of the teachings of Tibet into eight branches, and explains that, though the paths may vary, the destination is the same:

The lord of sentient beings in the Land of Snow [Avalokiteśvara] prophesied by the Victorious

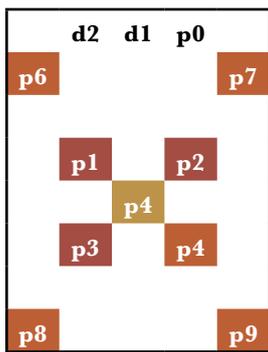
Was the sole intention of the unique teaching

Of the ancient King of the Dharma, the single divine monarch

Sherab Özer in *Meditation's Ambrosia of Immortality*. Translated by Marc-Henri Deroche²

Sherab Özer's work was a precursor and essential substrate for the *ris med* (impartial, non-sectarian) movement of the 19th and 20th centuries, a movement which "tried to overcome the limitation of the adherence to one's own school and identity, and at the same time preserve the richness and depth of the diverse traditions..."³.

Among Sherab Özer's political accomplishments was securing the patronage of royal family of the '*phyong rgyas* (Chonggye) valley – a family into which the 5th Dalai Lama was born into – by becoming the court chaplain of the ruler Hor Sonam Darggye. He also accepted the invitation of his son Hor Sonam Tobgyel, to establish the monastery of Pelri⁴. Pelri was one of the most important Nyingma monasteries in the 16th century, as most of the prominent Nyingma monasteries known today were founded in the 17th century with the patronage of the 5th Dalai Lama⁵. Sherab Özer was also a treasure revealer, though some of his most important works, such as *Sphere of Liberation* and *Self-Liberation of Intent* are no longer extant⁶.



d1 Amitayus

d2 Avalokiteshvara

p0 Padmasambhava

p1 **Karmapa 9** Wangchuk Dorje

1554 – 1601

P889

[1]rma pa dbang [2] rdo rje

p2 **Drigung 17** Rinchen Phuntsok

1509 – 1557

P399

rgyal dbang rin chen phun tshog

p3 **Tertön** Ratna Lingpa

1403 – 1479

P640

gter ston ra da na kling pa

p4 **Tertön** Sherab Ozer

1518 – 1584

P638

rje btson dam pa pra dz+nya rasmi

p5 **Lhochen 1** Phunstok Namgyel

P8592

bla ma phun tshog rnam rgyal

p6 **Sakya Trizin** Kunga Rinchen

1514 – 1584

P460

jamyang kun dga' blo gros

p7 **Tertön** Zhigpo Lingpa

1524 – 1583

P470

rig dzin zhig [3, po gling] pa

p8 **Tertön** Tashi Tobgyel

1550 – 1607

P646

rig dzin bkra shis stob rgyal

p9 **Drigung 21** Chogyal Phuntshok Tashi

1547 – 1602

P4580

chos rgyal phun tshog bkra shis dpal bzang po

1 Kapstein, Matthew. *gDams ngag: Tibetan Technologies of the Self*. 1995. In *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.

2 Deroche, Marc-Henri. *'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer (1518-1584) on the Eight Lineages of Attainment: Research on a Ris med Paradigm*. Contemporary Visions in Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the First International Seminar of Young Tibetologists, Brandon Doston et al. (eds). Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2009

3 Deroche, Marc-Henri. *'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer (1518-1584) on the Eight Lineages of Attainment: Research on a Ris med Paradigm*. Contemporary Visions in Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the First International Seminar of Young Tibetologists, Brandon Doston et al. (eds). Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2009

4 Deroche, Marc-Henri. *Sherab Ozer*. Treasury of Lives. <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Sherab-Wozer/8964>

5 Deroche, Marc-Henri. *History of the Forgotten Mother Monastery of the Ancients' School: The dPal ri Monastery in the Valley of the 'Tibetan Emperors*. Bulletin of Tibetology, 2013.

6 Deroche, Marc-Henri. *Sherab Ozer*. Treasury of Lives. <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Sherab-Wozer/8964>



The depiction of Sherab Özer is quite exquisite. The aureole around his head contains a thick outer layer of vegetal scrolling, capped at the apex by a wish-fulfilling gem. He had two distinct body aureoles, with multicolored rays of light. His robes include a fine gold-on-gold patterning, with floral medalions along the hems, and the four-fold composite cloud motif in the body. He holds a *vajra* in his proper left hand, and a *vase of long life* in his lap with his proper right hand. The lake from which his lotus emerges is filled with wish-fulfilling gems, birds, and fish.

This painting is immediately remarkable for the preponderance of treasure revealers, all depicted wearing the traditionally lotus hat of a Tertön. A historical peculiarity revealed by this painting is that these hats are completely red. Each figure is rendered with the gold pigment, a symbol of esteem one usually accords only to a Buddha. Stylistically, echoes of the painting style found in Gyantse Kumbum are found in the portrayal of the aureoles⁷. For example, see the angular segmentation of multicolored rays of light for Tertön Zhigpo Linga in the top right, the radial bands of multicolored rays for Sherab Özer, the Gyantse style throne on which the Drigung Abbot Chogyal Phuntsok Tashi sits in the bottom right. The overall color palette is much in line with the Gyantse style as well.

In contrast, the stylistic articulation of iconographic elements appears similar to that the paintings of the Sixteen Arhats attributed to Kheyntse Chenmo⁸. Examples of similar motifs are the four-fold square packing of the canonical Gyantse style cloud (found in the garments of several figures, Figure 1), the vegetal-scroll encircled floral pattern (draped over the fronts of the thrones in the top left and bottom right, Figure 2), and the – albeit partial – framing of figures with rocks (the bottom two figures, Figure 3), and the internal morphology of the contiguous pink band of clouds that fills the interstitial space between teachers.

Unusually, the arrangement of teachers gives prominence is given to disciples of Sherab Özer, whose large embodiments sit in the four corners of the painting. The *terminus ante quem* for this painting is 1579, when Chogyal Phuntsok Tashi ascended the throne of Drigung. Comparatively, Sherab Özer's three most prominent teachers and predecessors (the 9th Karmapa, his root teacher Drigung 17 Rinchen Phuntsok, and the important 15th century Tertön Ratna Lingpa), are all depicted as relatively small figures, seated on lotus petals that grow out of a lotus stem from the ground or water bodies. The small depiction signifies Sherab Özer's spiritual inheritance from them, without making them part of the painting's main statement.

The clearest evidence for a *'phyongs rgyas* (Chonggye) provenance of the work is the *dharmacakra* on the offering table of Sherab Özer: Chonggye is the only place where such an offering could be made. He is also referred to by the title *rje btsun dam pa* (Exalted Lord). That Tertön Tashi Tobgyel and Drigung Abbot Chogyal Phuntshok Tashi, who are portrayed at the bottom, had entered into *mchod yon* relations with the *'phyongs rgyas* clan, and that Tashi Tobgyel had wed married a princess of *'phyongs rgyas* family⁹ further lend credence to this suggestion. The painting most likely dates to the third quarter of the 16th century. Given that Chogyal Phuntsok Tashi is singled out with a Gyantse style throne, depicted without a lotus, and holds a flaming jewel often used to signify current lineage holders, I believe that the work was commissioned by Chogyal Phuntshok Tashi, in his capacity as priest of the Chonggye court, before his own passing in 1602, and possibly while Sherab Özer was alive (i.e. between 1579 – 1584).

7 Ricca, Franco and Erberto Lo Bue. *The Great Stupa of Gyantse: A complete Tibetan Pantheon of the Fifteenth Century*. Serindia Publications, London, 1993.

8 Jackson, David. *A Revolutionary Artist of Tibet: Kyentse Chenmo of Gongkar*. Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2016. See Figs 7.7, 9.4, 9.5

9 Deroche, Marc-Henri. *History of the Forgotten Mother Monastery of the Ancients' School: The dPal ri Monastery in the Valley of the 'Tibetan Emperors*. Bulletin of Tibetology, 2013.



Fig. 1: Four-fold composite of Gyantse cloud

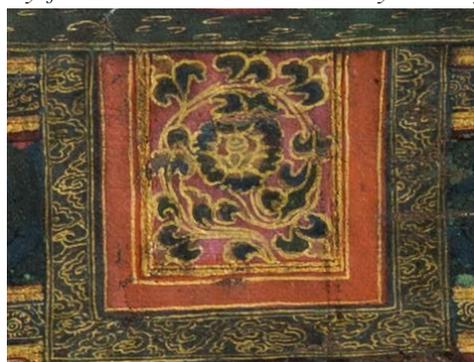


Fig. 2: Vegetal scrolling encircling lotus flower with wish fulfilling gem



Fig. 3: Rock formation framing teacher



KARMAPA 9 WANGCHUK DORJE (1555 - 1601)

18th century, Eastern Tibet
Distemper on cloth, 61.6 h × 40.0 w cm

In the 16th century, heirarchs of the Karma Kagyu school, and in particular, the 9th Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje, spent large amounts of time traveling across Tibet in a quasi-nomadic fashion. It is after this encampment-oriented lifestyle that the Karma Gardri school of painting was named. The school's melodious style was derived by the painter Namkha Tashi from Chinese models upon the instructions of the 5th Shamarpa Konchok Yenlak and the 4th Goshir Gyeltsap Drakpa Dondrup¹. A monumental (lifetime) portrait of the 9th Karmapa is considered to be the most securely dateable example of a painting from the original Karma Gardri school of painting. Having declined significantly in the 17th century, this painting tradition experienced a "revival" in the 18th century under the guidance of the 8th Situ Chokyi Jugne.

It is in the revival Karma Gardri style that this narrative painting depicting scenes from the life of the 9th Karmapa has been made. The 9th Karmapa wears the iconic black hat of his lineage, and holds a vase of long-life as he does in most of his depictions. Woven into his red colored robes are the gold outlines of a dragon and the 7 jeweled possessions of a *cakravartin* ruler. The attendants below him offer a wish fulfilling gem and a sutra book. A particularly unique feature of this work is the all-gold rendering of the Karmapa's throne, which combines an emphasize of his status with a monochronicity that makes it muted enough to avoid distracting from the nearby vignettes. The narrative scenes are typically rendered in two parts: a closeup of the 9th Karmapa engaged in an activity, and panoramic view that provides contextual information for said activity. One scene depicts the Karmapa's encampment outside of a town, another shows the Karmapa having visions, but in most of the others, the Karmapa is shown teaching various people. The presence of fauna is emphasized: from pigeons being fed, to horses grazing outside the encampment, and dogs playing and resting. Cloud formations are home to several ancillary figures, such as the two flying mystics in the top right, and Begtse Chen (the Karma Kagyu protector deity) in the center right.

The lineage teachers at the top of the painting are Atiśa (982 – 1055, TBRC P3379) and his foremost disciple, Dromton (1004 – 1064, TBRC P2557). It is through these two teachers that the Kadampa Lojong teachings entered into the Kagyu school. The Lojong practice often promotes reflection on one's own conduct; the vignettes in this painting - each of which is playful, exuberant, and moving - suggest the viewer tread a path of learning while staying

¹ Jackson, David. *Patron and painter: Situ Panchen and the revival of the encampment style*. Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2009.



MF 9th Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje (1555 - 1601)

A Atiśa

B Dromton

d1 Bernag Chen (Karma Kagyu Protector)

d2 Green protector holding katvanga and lasso

1 Karmapa teaches in a small town after setting up camp

2 Karmapa teaching a disciple under a tree while feeding pigeons

3 (a) A young boy leaves a monastery and plays with dogs outside (b) Karmapa teaches the boy near caves outside the monastery

4 Karmapa teaches two disciples across the bridge from a small town where a ritual dance with ghanti and damaru is being performed

5 Karmapa has a vision of a lama (possibly Padmasambhava) holding a trident and sitting on a lotus throne suspended over a lake. Disciples receiving teachings in this vision, while sea creatures offer gems. The disciples, having received teachings are now seen as flying mystics above the mountains.



true to their nature. Following Dromton, this lineage passed into the Kagyu school through Chennga Tsultrim Bar (1038 – 1103) and Potawa Rinchen Sel (1031 – 1105)² and then to the Mahamudrā lineage teacher, Gampopa (1079 – 1153, TBRC P1844; Milarepa's principle disciple). The emphasis on the Kadampa teachings shares a deep resonance with the narrative and naturalistic elements of this painting:

While the Kadampa tradition and teachings are undoubtedly rooted in original Indian Mahayana Buddhism, they nevertheless have a distinctively native Tibetan flavor, as reflected in the teaching style of the great lojong masters. One good example is Potawa Rinchen Sel, who employed local stories and examples taken from the everyday life of eleventh-century Tibet to make the teachings accessible to a large popular audience.³

Several other narrative paintings of Kagyu heirarchs have been made in a similar Karma Gardri style. However, based on a number of considerations, it is unlikely that any of these paintings belong to the same set⁴.

The miniature protector on the clouds in the top right (riding a brown horse, and holding a banner what appears to be a staff) and the green protector at the bottom center, have yet to be identified. Similarly, the contextual significance of the envisioned scene of the teacher on a lotus flower in the middle of a lake has not yet been determined.



2 A painting of Pawo Tsuglak Gyatso includes part of the Kagyu Lojong lineage, and apparently depicts both Chennga and Potawa as the lineage teachers after Atisa and Drontopa. See: Watt, Jeff. *Teacher (Lama) - Pawo 3, Tsuglak Gyatso*. Himalayan Art Resources. Oct 2005. Accessed 8 Jan 2019. <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/825>

3 Kyabgon, Traleg. *The Practice of Lojong: Cultivating Compassion through Training the Mind*. Shambhala Publications, 2007. Page 4

4 Lineage teachers of previous and subsequent paintings should be selected from the Lojong lineage, such as Chennga, Gampopa or (presumably) Mahamudrā lineage teachers for subsequent paintings, and Śākyamuni, Nagarjuna, Santideva for preceding paintings. Of the paintings examined, some belonged to the same painting tradition, but the concurrent presence of a Bodhisattva and a Red Hat Kagyu teacher made it unlikely for the paintings to belong to the same set (examples: HAR 10806, 65076, 93851 makes it unlikely that those two paintings belong to the same set. The last painting considered, HAR 65903, possibly depicting the 8th Karmapa Mikyo Dorje, could stylistically belong to the same set; except that it also contains Atisa and Dromton at the top. One other painting (HAR 4041) presents the same composition and narrative structure, with the addition of the 5th Shamarpa and 4th Gyeltsap seated on either side of the 9th Karmapa; though the painting is not a direct trace or copy, it appears to likely date to the 19th century.





DALAI LAMA 7 KELZANG GYATSO (1708 – 1757)

18th century, Central Tibet
Distemper on cloth, 66.0 h × 43.8 w cm

This painting belongs to a set of paintings¹ illustrating the secret biography of the 7th Dalai Lama, Kelzang Gyatso. The 7th Dalai Lama lived through a complex political milieu in Tibet, ranging from successive foreign rulers in Lhasang Khan and the Dzungar Mongols, to internal civil war. In his life he was recognized in secret, sought asylum in Derge and Amdo, recognized in public, installed at Lhasa, and exiled to Kham, all before finally returning to Lhasa late in his life². Despite all the odds, the 7th Dalai Lama went on to become a renowned writer, tantric master, and political leader.

This particular painting depicts the 7th Dalai Lama as a monastic teacher. Similar to portrayals of Milarepa, he is depicted surrounded by a large mountain range, with 8 small grottoes depicting various scenes of tantric study and practice from his life. Farther still, on the periphery of the painting are 8 siddha-like figures, who represent 8 of the 24 pilgrimage sites (*pīṭhā*) from the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*. Below his table is a tantric feast (*ganachakra*) around which the 5 Sense Goddesses have gathered. The landscape is filled with not-so-hidden sexual forms. Interpretation of this painting's iconography, however, requires a wholistic understanding of the entire set. This task requires a reconstruction of the hanging order of all of the paintings, determination the identity of the unknown 7th of the set, and from there, elucidation of the basic narrative and iconographic interpretation for the set.

The six known paintings depicts Kelsang Gyatso in three different roles (as a siddha, as a monastic teacher, and as hierarch and political leader), two deities from annuttarayoga tantra (Chakrasaṃvara and Kalachakra), and the Boddhisattva Avalokitesvara. The painting of Avalokitesvara contains all eight of the Great Boddhisattvas on the periphery, making it unlikely that there is another Boddhisattva in the set. The Dalai Lama is an emanation of Avalokitesvara, and this painting is proposed to be the centerpiece of the set.

It has been previously noted that 24 pilgrimage sites (*pīṭhā*) are distributed across only 3 paintings of the set (Siddha figure, Monastic figure, and the Kālacakra deity)³. To interpret this, we have to look beyond iconographic interpretation towards the canonical and functional narrative purposes of the *pīṭhā*. According to the canonical narrative, these pilgrimage sites are rooted in the narrative of Heruka's subjugation of *Maheśvara* in the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*:

*In the myth, Heruka becomes the emanation of Vajrapani, and Bhairava is the form Maheśvara takes. The twenty-four locales are sites where Bhairava and his consort, Bhairavi, are situated causing trouble for everyone. Heruka destroys Maheśvara, redefines the Bhairava/Bhairavi couples as Buddhists, and establishes his mandala by taking his place at the summit of Mount Meru.*⁴

Functionally, it has been noted that these *pīṭhā* served as places of gathering for siddhas, where the meaning of coded language in the tantras could be revealed and understood from others:

*The secret signs in India are closely related to places of pilgrimage...For Buddhist siddhas, the purpose of these is most often discussed as the recognition of participants in the ganachakra, the weekly tantric feast explored below in the consideration of siddha communities.*⁵

So in a sense, the tantric feast depicted in the paintings can be considered as a symbol for the role that members of congregation of siddhas play in the understanding and decoding of complex texts such as the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*. The number of sites as 24 is signifying the culmination of his journey as a siddha⁶. Thus, narrative purpose of the *pīṭhā*

1 A nearly complete version, printed on gold silk using wood block prints, of this set is in the possession of Tibet House, New Delhi. Most known paintings can be found at: <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=2937>. See <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=4519> for most known paintings of this subject.

2 Kapstein, Matthew. *The Seventh Dalai Lama, Kelzang Gyatso*. Treasury of Lives. <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Seventh-Dalai-Lama-Kelzang-Gyatso/3107>

3 This is pointed out by Jeff Watt in his article on the *pīṭhā*. Watt, Jeff. *Subject: Geography (Pīṭha Locations)*. (6-2017). Accessed 5 Jan 2019. <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=4519>.

4 *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: Social History of the Tantric Movement*. Ronald Davidson. Columbia University Press, New York, 2002. Page 202.

5 *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: Social History of the Tantric Movement*. Ronald Davidson. Columbia University Press, New York, 2002. Page 202.

6 *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: Social History of the Tantric Movement*. Ronald Davidson. Columbia University Press, New York, 2002. This source explains in great length that the *pīṭhā* are not directly appropriated from Kapalika or Saiva/Shakta sources. Rather, the selection of sites is far more complex. Davidson concludes that the common factor across all traditions are not the sites themselves, but their number (24).





R3 Shambhala
HAR 48285

R2 Kālacakra

R1 Siddha
HAR 100627

C Avalokiteśvara
HAR 100627

L1 Monastic

L2 Cakrasamvara
HAR

L3 Dalai Lama
HAR 71957



CENTER

AVALOKITEŚVARA

C Avalokiteśvara

- 1 Mañjushri (orange, sword)
- 3 Vajrapāṇi (blue, vajra)
- 5 Avalokiteśvara (white, cakra)
- 7 Sarvaṇīvaraṇaviṣkambhīn (orange, jewel)

- 2 Samantabhadra (red, vase)
- 4 Ākāśagarbha (blue, sword)
- 6 Maitreya (orange, flask and cakra)
- 8 Kṣitigarbha (green, flower)

1		2
3	C	4
5		6
7		8



RIGHT 1

KELSANG GYATSO AS A SIDDHA FIGURE

C Siddha at Pīṭhā

- 1 At Pīṭhā, in tantric pose w/ , *damaru*, *ghanti*
- 3 At Pīṭhā, in relaxed lotus
- 5 At Pīṭhā, on rock in a river
- 7 At Pīṭhā, in tantric pose

i 5 Sense Goddesses with *ganacakra*

- 2 At Pīṭhā, meditating near monastery
- 4 Siddha at Pīṭhā, in sexual union
- 6 Siddha at Pīṭhā, bandha in straw hut
- 8 Before beginning the journey

1		2
3	C	4
5	i	6
7		8



LEFT 1

KELSANG GYATSO AS A MONASTIC TEACHER

C Kelsang Gyatso as teacher

- 1 At *chandoha* kalinga
- 3 At *upapīṭha* rameśvara
- 5 At *upapīṭha* devikota
- 7 At *upaśmaśana* maru
- d** Guhyasamaja

i 5 Sense Goddesses with *ganacakra*

- 2 At *ksetra* odra
- 4 At *upaksetras* kośala
- 6 At *śmaśana* sindhu
- 8 At *upachandoha* himalaya

1	d	2
3	C	4
5	i	6
7		8



RIGHT 2

SIDDHA KELSANG GYATSO HAVING VISIONS OF KĀLACAKRA

Ca Cakrasamvara

- 1 At Pīṭhā
- 3 At Pīṭhā
- 5 At Pīṭhā
- 7 At Pīṭhā

Cb Kelsang Gyatso as siddha from R1

- 2 At Pīṭhā
- 4 At Pīṭhā
- 6 At Pīṭhā
- 8 At Pīṭhā

1		2
3	Ca	4
5	Cb	6
7		8



LEFT 2

MONASTIC TEACHER KELSANG GYATSO HAVING VISIONS OF CHAKRASAMVARA

Ca Cakrasamvara

- 1 Vajrabhairava
- 3 Teacher performing ritual
- 5 5 Sense Goddesses, *ganacakra*, & Mandala
- 7 Teacher performing ritual
- 9 Palden Lhamo with assembly

Cb Kelsang Gyatso as teacher (L1)

- 2 Hayagriva
- 4 Teacher performing ritual
- 6 City with monastic complex
- 8 Vision of Dalai Lama (L3) Offerings of crown, ghanti, vajra etc.

1		2
3	Ca	4
5	Cb	6
7	9	8



RIGHT 3

KELSANG GYATSO THROUGH KĀLACAKRA HAVING VISIONS OF THE FINAL BATTLE

C King Rudra, the last King of Shambhala

- 1 Kingdom of Shambhala
- 3 King attending court
- 5a Army going to battle
- 5b King in battle slaying demons

- 2 Vision of Kālacakra (L3)
- 4 Riding out to battle in chariot?
- 6 Guardians of the 10 directions?
- 5d Slain demons

1		2
3	C	4
5a		6
5a	5b	5d



LEFT 3

KELSANG GYATSO IN LHASA AS THE 7TH DALAI LAMA

C Kelsang Gyatso as 7th Dalai Lama

- 1a Having visions of...(1b)
- 1b Shakyamun Buddha with 16 disciples
- 5 Receiving offerings at
- 7 Having vision of standing Avalokitesvara
- 9 Shadbhuja Mahakala with retinue of 5

- 2 Having visions of...(2b)
- 4 Manjusri and Dhṛtarāṣṭra (Guardian, East)
- 6 Receiving offerings at
- 8 Having vision of Śākyamuni Buddha

i		ii
1b		2b
1a	C	2a
5		6
7	9	8



necessitates that the painting of Cakrasaṃvara⁷ be placed after the three paintings containing the pilgrimate sites. This interpretation makes sense iconographically as well, as the 24 pairs of deities (totalling 48), and the offerings to the 5 Sense Goddesses are all depicted within the 62 deity Chakrasaṃvara mandala (the 4 of the 5 Sense Goddesses appear in the mandala retinue). Despite the centrality of the pilgrimage sites to narrative and iconographic structure of Cakrasaṃvara, Jeff Watt notes that this set contains "the only known reference to the pithas in himalayan art"⁸.

Both the Kālacakra painting and the Cakrasaṃvara painting illustrate the central figure as emerging from the visions [multicolored rays of light] of Kelsang Gyatso (as a siddha and monastic figure respectively). This repetition of the central figure is a narrative device linking adjacent paintings in the hanging order. Based on this logical assumption, we note that the Cakrasaṃvara painting also has a teacher envisioning the presence of a Dalai Lama figure in the bottom right corner, meaning that the painting of Kelsang Gyatso as Dalai Lama should be adjacent to the Cakrasaṃvara painting. The above considerations are mathematically sufficient to construct the exact hanging order described on the previous page.

The missing painting in the set is the third painting on the proper right (R3), and would be adjacent to the Kālacakra painting. I therefore looked for paintings made in a similar painting style, with the same 2×4 arrangement of scenes around the central figure, with a figure of Kālacakra emerging from multicolored rays, one that has multiple copies possibly printed from woodblocks, and ideally, linked in some way to an emanation of Avalokiteśvara or a deity from an annutarayoga tantra. One painting depicting Rudra, the last King of Shambhala as the central figure, matched all of the above criteria perfectly⁹.

The entire story can now be read in the context of the life of Kelzang Gyatso. He is born as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, and in his youth receives the blessings of all of the 8 Great Bodhisattvas, representing his monastic study as a youth (C). Residing in Kham, and having been exiled from his seat at Lhasa, he is introduced to the congregations of siddhas (symbolized by the 5 Sense Goddesses holding the constituent offerings of the tantric feast), and he begins to visit various *pīṭhā* to understand the complex language in highest teachings (R1). Next, he begins to dedicate time as a monastic teacher and in exegetical writings of the tantras, while continuing periodic retreats to the *pīṭhās* (represented by the small vignettes in the mountains). His tantric training is progressing extremely well (symbolized by the *katvanga* and crown near him in the center of the present painting) (L1). He finally has a vision of himself as Kālacakra, probably having mastered the root text and the *Vimalaprabhā* amongst others, and finishes his visitation to all 24 *pīṭhā* (R2). The culmination of the knowledge gained allows him to have a vision of subjugating all 24 Bhairvas, converting them into Vajrabhairava (depicted at the top of one version of the painting), and using the authority of the *kathvanga* and crown, he envisions himself as Cakrasaṃvara (L2). With his spiritual training now complete, he envisions his return to the political domain, and invokes the religiopolitical undertones in the Kālacakra tantra by using its analogy of King Rudra in the Final Battle, defeating enemies of the *dharma* (R3). His visions come true, as political obstacles dissipate: he goes to Lhasa and is finally able to fulfill his role as Dalai Lama (L3).

This article is concluded with some stylistic comments. The heavy reliance on the multicolored rainbows and the style of rendering the clouds suggests the set may have been designed in Kham, the region in which Kelsang Gyatso was born and spent the many years engaged in tantric practice while in exile. The differences in colorings between the sets suggest that the designs were disseminated widely, and produced at various artistic centers across Tibet. Despite the use of woodblocks in many of the copies, a very careful comparison shows that this particular painting displays divergences not only in coloring, but in the drawing as well. The most prominent example is such divergence is the depiction of deity Guhyasamaja seated at the top (all others versions deriving from the block prints show instead, a small dragon emerging out of the clouds).

7 For example, in the 62 deity Chakrasaṃvara mandala, there are 3 concentric circles with 8 pairs of deities each, or 24 pairs of 48 of the 62 deities.

8 Watt, Jeff. *Subject: Geography (Pitha Locations)*. (6-2017). Accessed 5 Jan 2019. <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=4519>.

9 See *Himalayan Art Resources* painting ids 48285 and 94398

Table 1

L1: Siddha	R1: Monastic	L2: Kālacakra
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Structured List of 24 Pithas based on the *Chakrasamvara Tantra* "recasting"
Indian Esoteric Buddhism: Social History of the Tantric Movement. Ronald Davidson. Columbia University Press, New York, 2002. Page 207

4 pithas	uddiyana	jalandhara	pulliyamalaya	arbuda
4 upapithas	rameśvara	devikota	godavari	malava
2 ksetras	odra		kamarupa	
2 upaksetras	kośala		triśakuni	
2 chandohas	kalinga		lampaka	
2 upachandohas	himalaya		kañci	
2 śmaśanas	sindhu		nagara	
2 upaśmaśanas	maru		kulata	
2 melapakas	pretapuri		grhadevata	
2 upamelapakas	saurastra		suvarnadvipa	

The symmetry with which the 8 pithas in the monastic figure painting fit the structured list cannot be a result of chance, and indicates clear knowledge of the structured list. Therefore, the list of pithas in the Siddha and Kālacakra painting are inferred.

8 pithas in the monastic figure painting are assigned based off of inscriptions read by Jeff Watt: <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/46911>)



13	11	10	8	4	2	1	3	5	7	9	12	14
19	23	22								6	15	16
20	21										17	18

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>1 Vajradhara</p> <p>2 Vajrasattva</p> <p>3 Saraha</p> <p>4 Nagarjuna</p> <p>5 Savaripa</p> <p>6 Luyipa</p> <p>7 Darikapa</p> <p>8 Ghantapada</p> <p>9 Kurmapada</p> <p>10 Sri Jalandhara</p> <p>11 Krnacarin</p> <p>12 Guhyapa</p> <p>13 Tilopa</p> <p>14 Naropa</p> <p>15 gcen 'jigs med grags pa</p> | <p>16 gcung ngag kyi dbang phyug</p> <p>17 klog skya shes rab brtsegs pa</p> <p>18 mal lo tsa ba blo gros grags</p> <p>19 Sachen Kunga Nyingpo</p> <p>20 Sonam Tsemo (1142-1182)</p> <p>21 Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147-1216)</p> <p>22 Sakya Pandita (1182-1251)</p> <p>23 rig pa'i seng ge (P3089)</p> <p>P sangs rgyas 'bum (P3090)</p> <p>TBRC L1RKL821</p> | <p> This color means identity of figure has been iconographically confirmed</p> <p> This color means identity of figure has been inferred from lineage</p> |
|---|---|--|

62-Chakrasamvara Mandala, Luyipa Tradition
 circa 1280, Tibet.
 Distemper on Cloth

CHIMED OZER (1574 – 1661)

ca. 1650, Kingdom of Mangyul Gungthang

18 h × 14 w × 12 d cm

Bronze alloy with gold pigment

མ་རྟོགས་པའི་དབང་ཕྱུག་ཆེན་པོ་འཆི་མེད་འོད་ཟེར་ལ་ཕྱག་བཞུགས།

The enlightened Great Lord* (Milarepa), Chimé Özer, I prostrate to you

*A commonly used epithet for Milarepa, whom Chimed Ozer was considered an emanation of

Along the main route between Nepal and Tibet, one finds the old Kingdom of Mangyul Gungthang. It is the birthplace of the Great Yogi and Poet, Milarepa and the caverns in its landscape are home to many of his famous mountain retreats. Recent scholarship, has shed light on the history of this mostly overlooked principality of the Qinghai–Tibetan Plateau¹ and an extensive biographical account of the Tertön Chimé Özer² who was an important persona there in the 17th century. Chimé Özer was born into a branch of the Gur family, which maintained a sub-school of Drukpa Kagyu called Dochen (*mdo chen*) as the dominant religious tradition of the area since the 13th century. He decided to style his life after Milarepa by emphasizing time in retreat instead of scholarly pursuits. Having spent many years in meditation at Milarepa's cave of *spong lung* amongst others, and composing numerous spiritual songs, he eventually became known as an emanation of Milarepa.

The bronze, in both its inscription and in its iconographic form emphasizes Chimé Özer's status as an emanation of Milarepa. From an art historical perspective, the work embodies a duality. It has the mass appeal and immediate relatability of a famous and beloved persona on one hand, and the opportunity for mystery in discovery in its portrayal of a poorly known figure in a lesser studied land on the other. The work is of exceptional quality. It eschews the signification of status by decorative motifs, preferring instead to emphasize the simplicity of an ascetic life lived in the isolation of mountain caves. Simple, yet filled with heartfelt devotion to the sitter. The casting is exceptionally fine, with perfectly articulated lotus petals, deep and elegant folds of his robes, a thick cushion to denote status, and a beard sharp as a knife to symbolize how his poetic words cut through illusions to speak to the heart. Like Milarepa, his right hand is next to his ear in the listening gesture and he sits as an ascetic on the skin of an antelope. In addition to the beard, the topknot of his hair that differentates him from Milarepa, and refers to his family's status in the region.

Few works are definitively known to be from the Kingdom of Mangyul Gungthang. Given the highly local nature of this personage, this work may have been made there. However, since Chimé Özer and his son commissioned works from Nepal for the site *zva pug brag dmar chos gling* in 1637³, works with a Mangyul Gungthang provenance should not immediately be assumed to have been manufactured in that area.



1 Ehrhard, Franz-Karl. *A Rosary of Rubies: The Chronicle of the Gur-rigs mDo-chen Tradition from South-Western Tibet*. Indus-Verlag, München, 2008.

2 Solmsdorf, Nikolai. *Treasure-Traditions of Western Tibet: Rig-'dzin Gar-dbang rdo-rje snying-po (1640–1685) and His Activities in Mang-yul Gung-thang*. Indus-Verlag, München, 2014.

3 Ibid.



JONANG CHOKLE NAMGYEL (1306 – 1386)

ca. 1360, Tsang Province, Tibet

22.1 h × 21.6 w × 15.9 d cm

Bronze with Copper and Silver Inlay

ཀུན་མཁྱེན་ཚོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་རྫོ་ནང་པའི།
བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡུལ་རྣམས་ཀུན་ཏུ་ཐུབ་པ་དང་།
ཕྱོགས་རྣམས་ཀུན་ཏུ་ནམ་ཡང་མི་རུབ་ཅིང་།
དུས་རྣམས་ཀུན་ཏུ་འཕེལ་ཞིང་དར་བར་ཤོག།

Omniscient Dharma King of Jonang
spread the teachings far and wide,
and in all directions which never decline,
May (the dharma) spread and flourish eternally.

བདེ་གཤེགས་ཀུན་བཟང་མཚོང་བའི་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ལྷ་ར།
རྒྱལ་བ་འཁོར་བཅས་འདིར་ནི་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཤོག།
ངན་སྲིག་ལོག་པའི་ཚིགས་རྣམས་བཅོམ་འགྱུར་ཞིང་།
རྒྱལ་སྐོས་རིགས་འདི་ནི་ཚོས་རྣམས་འཕེལ་དར་ཏེ།

As auspicious as seeing the Buddha Samantabhadra,
the Victorious Ones and consorts, and all that is auspicious,
is it to spread the teachings of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,
and to defeat harmful, untruthful and sinful words.

ཞལ་མཚོང་ཅམ་གྱི་བདེ་བའི་མཚོག་བརྟེས་པ།
ནི་ལྷ་འཁོར་རྫོ་རྒྱ་ལྷ་འོད་གསལ་ཞིང་།
བདག་དང་འགོ་ལ་ཞལ་རྫོ་བྱིན་ཆེ་ནས།
བསྐྱེད་པའི་མཐར་ཐུག་བར་དུ་བཞུགས་སུ་གསོལ།

Merely seeing your face we obtain supreme bliss.
As auspicious as the sun and radiant as the moon,
May you remain until the end of age to bless us and all beings.

trans. Karma Gelek

This voluminous bronze depicts a heirarch of the Jonang order of *Vajrayāna* Buddhism. He sits with his hands in *bhumiparsha mudrā* in allusion to the moment of Śākyamuni's enlightenment. The first line of the inscription refers to the seated figure by the title *kun mkhyen chos kyi rgyal po jo nang pa'i* or Omniscient Dharma King of Jonang. The title (*sans* place identifier) is often used to describe the 3rd Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (1284–1339, P66), and the Nyingmapa Longchen Rabjam (1308–1364, P1583), both of whose philosophical contributions helped to shape Jamgon Kongtrul's *shengtong* Madhyamaka, alongside those of the Jonang abbot Sherab Gyeltsen (1292–1361, P139). It appears to me that, had the inscription been using a title for Sherab Gyeltsen, it would have used *dol po* or *dol po pa* for the place identifier (instead of *jo nang*), and a higher title of *sangs rgyas* or *sangs rgyas kun mkhyen*¹. The title *chos kyi rgyal po* was instead used to refer to another abbot of Jonang, Chokle Namgyel (1306 - 1386)². If so, then second and third lines, which describe the spreading of teachings, could an expanded reference to his name, Chokle Namgyel, which means "Victorious in All Directions" (which was acquired for his renowned oratory skill in the “defeat harmful, untruthful, and sinful words”). The last stanza is reminiscent of Chokle Namgyel's first encounter with Dolpopa, and could be a reference to that event:

*According to tradition, when the curtain was parted he beheld the unbearable brilliance of Dolpopa's body and prostrated. Perceiving the wondrous aroma of moral discipline and the major and minor physical marks of a buddha on Dolpopa's body...*³

If the bronze is Chokle Namgyel, could it be that the disciple who commissioned this work is saying that he feels the same way towards Chokle Namgyel as Chokle Namgyel once felt towards Dolpopa Sherab Gyeltsen? The voluminous form and the facial features are remarkably similar to Dolpopa, though I could find no extant work depicting Dolpopa in *bhumiparsha mudrā* instead of the "mind refreshing" *mudrā*, nor any work of Jonang Chokle Namgyel with which to assess similarity to the present work. The sitter is portrayed herein with a serene and enlightened gaze, replete with silver-inlay, and an incised slit for a third-eye in homage to the title *kun mkhyen* (Omniscient). The diction in supplication for the longevity of the sitter indicates that the bronze is a lifetime portrait, which, gauging from the hairline, may have been early in the second half of the sitter's life.

Chokle Namgyel was one of Dolpopa Sherab Gyeltsen's closest disciples, and a master of the Drö tradition of the *Kālacakra* teachings. Having taught both Sabzang Pakpa Zhonnu Lodro (a teacher of Ngorchen) and Tsongkhapa, Chokle Namgyel played a role in the continuation of that Drö *Kālacakra* tradition within both the Ngor branch of the Sakya school and the Gelug school (despite eventual differences in interpretation). Written sometime between between

1 Stearns, Cyrus. *The Buddha from The Buddha from Dolpo: A Study of the Life and Thought of the Tibetan Master Dolpopa Sherab Gyeltsen* Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, New Delhi, 2002.

2 Stearns, Cyrus. *Chokle Namgyel. Treasury of Lives*. <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Chokle-Namgyel/2812>

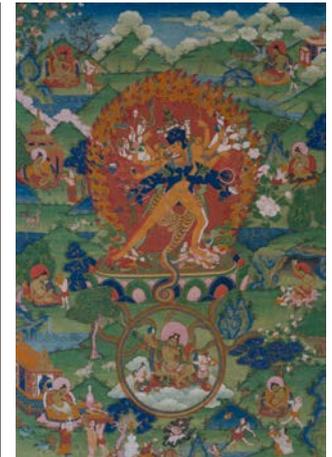
3 *Ibid*



1025 and 1040⁴ the Kālacakra is an one of the few texts with precise dating. It displays highly complex language⁵, and is often described as the most syncretic text for its integration of ideas that may have been first encountered in non-Buddhist milieu.

4 Newman, John. *Islam in the Kālacakra Tantra*. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*. Volume 21, Number 2, 1998.

5 Newman, John. *Buddhist Sanskrit in the Kālacakra Tantra*. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*. Volume 11, Number 1, 1988.



MAHASIDDHA VIRUPA (837-909)

15th Century, Central Tibet

10.8 h × 7.4 w × 5.9 d cm

Bronze alloy with copper and silver inlay

Virupa, the first human progenitor of the Lamdre lineage, is seen here in a classic iconographic form¹: holding his right hand in a menacing, pointing gesture in allusion to a story wherein he pins a sunbeam in place². He is seated on an antelope skin and wears jewelry constructed out of flowers and vegetal scrolls. Symbolizing a crown, the strands of hair are wrapped into a topknot. The floral and vegetal wreath at his hairline is capped by a Gyantse style rendition of a lotus flower (Figure 1)³, suggesting a 15th century date for this piece⁴. Other stylistic and iconographic elements to note are Virupa's elongated earlobes with simple and small circular earrings, his copper and silver inlaid eyes, copper inlaid lips, and the rather unusual rendering of the top of the lotus.

1 This is one of six common iconographic forms of Virupa, as elucidated by Ngorchen Kunga Gyeltsen. <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=1988>. This particular form is by a large margin the most popular.

2 Davidson, Ronald. *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: Social History of the Tantric Movement*. Columbia University Press, New York, 2002. See page 259

3 *Ushanishavijaya*. Himalayan Art Resources. <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/21422>

4 Of the 55 bronzes of Virupa present on on Himalayan Art Resources, only three have this "Gyantse style" Lotus flower at the base of the hairline (HAR 73889, HAR 85781, and the present work, HAR 90084). All three of these works could very plausibly be dated to the 15th century.



Figure 1: Detail of lotus flower in a 15th century Gyantse style painting of Ushanishavijaya.





NAZA DRAKPUGPA (1277 - 1350)

mid-14th century, Central Tibet

17.5 h × 13.7 w × 11.8 d cm

Possibly commissioned by Yeshe Pal (TBRC P5724)

Inscribed along the bottom

བསོད་ནམས་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཚོགས་གནིས་ལས།
ལེགས་འཕྲུངས་དོན་གནིས་དཔལ་གྱི་འབྱོར།
ཚོ་འདིར་བསྐྱབ་ལ་བཙོན་མཛད་པའི།
ནམ་བཟའ་པ་ལ་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ།

From the two accumulations of merit and pristine cognition,
arise two kinds of benefits (personal and altruistic).

Nam za pa, who, strives to achieve such in his entire life,

To you, I prostrate.

trans. Karma Gelek

This sculpture depicts the Lamdre lineage master Sonam Pel (*bsod nams dpal*, TBRC P3092). The portrait has clear markers of realism, such as the distinctively portrayed stout ears, thin nose, and receding hairline. However, the long, arched eyebrows and dimpled, slit-like eyes, and radiant smile indicate that this realism was tempered with an admixture of features that signify this teacher's equanimity and poise. The remarkably simple monastic robes pay homage to the epithet of Naza Dragpugpa (**Master of the Rock Cave**, *nam bza' drag phug pa*) earned by this master for the many years he spent in the isolation of his mountain cave. He here performs the *dharmacakra mudrā*, an allusion to the Buddha's first sermon where he is said to have set the wheel of dharma in motion, and symbolizing supreme insight by skillful means (the union of *upaya* and *prajña*). Of particular stylistic note are the trapezoidal shape of the base (commonly found in works prior to the 15th century) and the extremely short, wide, and flat lotus petals.

The inscription names this master twice, once with a reference to his epithet¹, and the second with an encoding of his personal name. The same method is used to encode the name Yeshe Pal (*ye shes dpal*, P5724), who was a student of Naza Dragpugpa and probably the person who commissioned this sculpture sometime in the mid-14th century, and possibly even during the lifetime of this master.

The Lamdre lineage bifurcates at Naza Dragpugpa into the Ngorpa Lamdre lineage that passes through Palden Tsultrim and Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo, and the Gongkarwa Lamdre lineage that passes through the powerful and famous Sakya teacher Lama Dampa Sonam Gyeltsen and Thekchen Chöje.

¹ *nam bza' pa* is an abbreviation of *nam bza' drag phug pa*. This abbreviation is used in at least one recorded list of the Lamdre Lineage (TBRC W29307, Volume 19)





THEKCHEN CHOKYI GYALPO (1349 - 1425)

ca. 1425 [post 1412], Central Tibet

13.2 *h* × 11.0 *w* × 8.9 *d* cm

Inscribed on backside: *theg chen chos kyi rgyal po la na mo*

Thekchen Chöje was a high ranking member of the Sakya Khön family. During his lifetime, he was patronized by the last Yuan emperor, Togön Temür (r. 1333 to 1370) and personally invited by the Yongle emperor (r. 1403 to 1424) to the Imperial Court¹. He was also a central figure in the establishment of a branch of the Lamdre lineage centered at the monastery Gongkar Chöede. Gongkar Chöede is well known for its c.1470 murals by Khyentse Chenmo, the originator of the Khyenri tradition of painting.

In this work, Thekchen Chöje's hand is held in the *bhumispharsha mudrā* while wearing a rosary on his left hand and donning dual meditational cloaks. With ends folded over his left shoulder, the inner cloak contains a square patchwork with a Khasa Malla style rice-grain pattern along the seams. In contrast, the hexagonal pattern on the inside lining of the outer cloak is a clear reference to an expensive early Ming period textile (Figure 1). On the backside, the robes display a vertical striation and a separate fabric for the collar. The absence of flowers and cloud motifs – which were popularized in the 15th century by the influx of Chinese gifts to teachers such as Thekchen Chöje – suggests that the piece would not have been made much later than 1425, when this teacher passed away.

Thekchen Chöje's face is the work's most mesmerizing feature. It shows remnants of the gold pigment, indicating that at one time, the face was fully painted with gold pigment. Thekchen Chöje's facial features are distinctive in ways neither encountered commonly nor which facilitate portrayal of his qualifications in the *dharma*. Specifically, he is found here with with a wide nose, prominent cheekbones, a broad forehead, and depressed chin. These unique features suggest the work may have been made in the likeness of the sitter during his lifetime. Other known sculptures of Thekchen Chöje include a large sculpture at Gyantse monastery dated to 1425, and another large sculpture at Gongkar Choede made by Khyentse Chenmo in the second half of the 15th century²; both these works belong to sets depicting Lamdre lineage masters and – though they are masterpieces – neither shows Thekchen Chöje with the with the same level of distinctiveness as the present work.

1 Jackson, David. *A Revolutionary Artist of Tibet: Kyentse Chenmo of Gongkar*. Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2016.

2 Jackson, David. *A Revolutionary Artist of Tibet: Kyentse Chenmo of Gongkar*. Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2016. Jackson writes that Khyentse Chenmo "had never seen Thekchen Chöje but attempted to depict his face true to life"



Figure 1: An early Ming textile. A hexagonal pattern frames the flowers of the four seasons.



